

POETICS OF PRESENCE: THE WORK OF
OLIVERIO GIRONDO, JORGE EDUARDO EIELSON, AND
THE NOIGANDRES GROUP OF CONCRETE POETRY

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the nineteenth century there emerged a set of poetic principles that considered the existence of the poem beyond verse, feet, the accepted set of poetic forms and most importantly considered that the poem did not only belong to the realm of temporal arts, but that also could have a presence in space. At the beginnings of the twentieth century Modernism and the avant-garde carried on these principles of innovation. But by the end of the 1930s these efforts seem to reach an end. In Latin America in particular poetry by that time seemed to become more interested in social and historical issues than in experimentation and innovation of forms. However, there were some poets who never abandoned their innovative spirit. It was in the 1950s that a second wave of artists looked back to the spirit of those innovators of Modernism and the historical avant-garde movements in order to reconnect with that tradition. They saw that in their efforts there was a lot more at stake than the simple search for new forms; there was a revolution in the conception of poetry. In their work they found new conceptions about the organisation of the work of literature that could be indicative of a new poetic reality, one where poetry was no longer constrained by time based structures. Those implications reverberated to the very roots of the existence of the work of literature. The works analysed and interpreted in this work belong to that second wave of innovative artists that searched for the extension of the poem out of the realm of temporality and into the domain of space. That is, they wanted to make the poem present in the world.

This thesis discusses the work of Argentinean poet Oliverio Girondo, Peruvian poet and artist Jorge Eduardo Eielson, and the Brazilian Noigandres group of concrete poetry in relation to the issues and concepts of presence in their work. New ways of organising the work of literature prompted questions about its way of being. Traditionally the

work of literature had been considered a temporal art but with the innovative conceptions of literature and art such consideration had to be put under question. It is not that literature had ceased to be a temporal art but that these authors integrated into their works spatial elements that transformed the way they are, and the way they are read. The works discussed in this thesis indicate their considerations about presence, the presence of the work of literature both as a concept within the works and as an issue to be addressed with the form of the work. This thesis shows the different forms in which these authors explored these issues. Their considerations about presence are ultimately a way to reconsider the 'place' and therefore presence of the work of literature in the simultaneously industrial and underdeveloped reality of Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely of my own composition and that it contains no material previously published or submitted for the award of any other degree.

Antonio Ochoa

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ABBREVIATIONS

Oliverio Gironde

OC—Oliverio Gironde, *Obra Completa*, ed. by Raúl Antelo, Colección Archivos, 38 (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 1999). The secondary texts taken from the dossier will have a reference in the footnotes with author, title and page number.

Jorge Eduardo Eielson

VEOM—*Vivir es una obra maestra (poesía escrita)* (Madrid: Ave del paraíso, 2003). Within my text I will sometimes name particular books of poems, but the page number always refers to this edition unless otherwise noted.

Nu/do—José Ignacio Padilla, ed., *Nu/do: homenaje a J. E. Eielson* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2002)

CGN—*El cuerpo de Giulia-no* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1971)

PMM—*Primera muerte de María* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988)

AP—*Arte poética*, ed. and intro. by Luis Rebaza Soraluz (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2004)

Concrete Poetry

TPC—Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, *Teoria da poesia concreta: textos críticos e manifestos 1950-1960* ([Sao Paulo]: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1975)

GC—Gonzalo Aguilar, ed., *Galaxia Concreta* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1999)

VV—Augusto de Campos, *Viva-Vaia: poesia 1949-1979* (Sao Paulo: Ateliê, 2000)

XE—Haroldo de Campos, *Xadrez de Estrelas: percurso textual 1949-1974* (Sao Paulo: Perspectiva, 1976). Although there are numbers in some pages of this book, there are none in the poems that I quote in this work. I will number the poems one through six.

PPÉP—Décio Pignatari, *Poesia pois é poesia 1950-2000* (Sao Paulo: Ateliê/UNICAMP, 2004)

Note: Due to unforeseen circumstances I had to finish my thesis moving back and forth between Mexico and the United States. This situation presented serious problems concerning the access to editions consulted at different moments of this project. Some of the texts quoted in this work are from the editions available in the different places where I concluded this work. Regarding this issue I humbly request the readers' leniency and understanding for any inconveniences that this may cause.

A O

For Marcia Castro-Leal and Lorenzo Ochoa,
my parents

Existe una narrativa clásica, linear, plana, bidimensional, que acepta pasivamente las convenciones de la lengua, así como las viejas coordenadas del espacio y tiempo newtoniano. Y otra, la que nace en los primeros años del siglo, paralelamente a los grandes descubrimientos de la mecánica cuántica, a la teoría de la relatividad generalizada de Einstein y al arte abstracto, que describe un universo menos accesible. Esta última no explora solamente nuestros condicionamientos sociales y psicológicos, sentimientos, intereses, pulsiones, sino que intenta penetrar en la trama misma de nuestra existencia, en la azarosa estructura del acontecer humano, valiéndose para ello de un lenguaje igualmente azaroso, discontinuo, fragmentado, un lenguaje que, sobre todo, duda de sí mismo porque duda de la real consistencia del mundo. En suma, un lenguaje no euclidiano, cuyas coordenadas espacio-temporales han saltado y cuyas imágenes van más allá de la literatura para convertirse en otra cosa, para acceder a otra dimensión, a otro lenguaje que, sin destruir lo específico literario, revitalice la escritura, le asigne un nuevo valor, un verdadero enganche con la realidad profunda de nuestro tiempo. A todo eso llamo yo literatura tridimensional.¹

Jorge Eduardo Eielson

¹ Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *El diálogo infinito: una conversación con Martha L. Canfield* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana/Artes de México, 1995), pp. 68-69.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries Modernism and the avant-garde movements ventured to organise the work of art in new ways.² Among other things, these artistic practices challenged the accepted norms of order, perception, and communication and proposed the liberation of the mind. These responded partly to a crisis in representation which had created a rupture between language and the things that language meant to designate. As William Rowe explains, in Latin America the avant-garde:

Has a particular concern with dismantling symbolism in poetic language. This occurs in three main ways: the sense that things in time never stop changing and do not fit with the stability produced by words; the notion that only in a fixed and stable universe can one thing stand for another and thus that the mechanism of symbolism (which makes one thing stand for several) is dubious; and the understanding, therefore, that social symbols cannot be used uncritically.³

² The critical bibliography about the avant-garde is extensive. Dietrich Scheunemann concisely reassesses the polemic around the terms avant-garde and neo-avant-garde in his essay 'From Collage to the Multiple: On the Genealogy of Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde', in Dietrich Scheunemann, ed., *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, *Avant-Garde Critical Studies*, 17 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 15-48.

³ William Rowe, 'Introduction', *Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and Inner Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-28 (p. 13).

If symbolism in poetry was dismantled by the Latin American avant-garde because it placed the poetic reality somewhere other than in a use of language conscious of its historical reality, then the efforts of avant-garde poets can be regarded as directed at the presentation of a tangible poetic reality; that is, the creation of works that could be placed in the socio-historical world of man. In the essay 'Los signos en rotación' Octavio Paz questions whether it is possible 'pensar en una sociedad que reconcilie al poema y al acto'.⁴ This was, according to Peter Bürger, one of the main goals of the historical avant-garde movements at the beginnings of the twentieth-century:

In summary, we know that the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunctions of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former. The avant-garde intends the abolitions of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life.⁵

Adding together Paz's question and Bürger's premise we can reformulate them to encompass the questions that this work seeks to answer, the actual possibilities of art having a direct connection to and impact on life. This reconciliation between the poem and the act, which is the idea of a reunion of life and art, can be thought of in terms of presence. That is to say, it is through the reconsiderations about the presence of the work of literature that this impact and connection to the world can be re-established. As I have inferred from Rowe's passage, the dismantling of symbolism in poetry is directly connected with the localisation of the poem. A way of addressing this was not only to write a

⁴ Octavio Paz, 'Los signos en rotación', in *El arco y la lira*, 3rd edn (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972; repr. 1998), p. 253-284 (p. 253).

⁵ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw, foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Theory and History of Literature*, 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 53-54.

poetry that was critical of its own mechanisms but also that was founded on its very materiality; a materiality conscious of its place and time.

The present thesis deals with the work of the Argentinean poet Oliverio Girondo, the Peruvian poet and artist Jorge Eduardo Eielson and the poets from the Noigandres group of Concrete Poetry. It is divided by chapters dedicated to the work of each of these three writers (I refer to the Noigandres group as one since I deal with it as a common project although I analyse the individual work of its members Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari throughout the chapter dedicated to them). I have not tried a comparative analysis of their work. Rather I have structured my analysis as individual case studies of the work of each of the writers. My reason for doing so is that as I advanced in my investigation the coherence of each individual chapter demonstrated that it would be more intellectually successful than a comparative analysis which would have drawn my conclusions in a preconceived way. I did not want to impose a set of questions that could be or could not be corroborated by the work of each individual writer. For as William Rowe explains in the introduction to his study on Latin American poetry regarding the reading of innovative poetry in the avant-garde tradition: 'the tendency is to put one's confidence in an interpretative system rather than to be guided by the poems.'⁶ What I have done is that keeping the main idea about presence that crosses and unites the chapters, I have modified the questions according to the works themselves. In doing so I have not imposed a concept of presence in the work of these poets, but I have tried to prove that in their work there is a preoccupation for its material presence that takes different forms and creates different results for each poet. My intention thus was to allow the poems and the poets' poetics to guide my inquires into their work, to follow the paths that they opened and to interpret their work based on questions that sprung from the direct reading of the texts. Therefore, the

⁶ William Rowe, 'Introduction', in *Poets of Contemporary Latin America*, p. 6.

use of theory and criticism in this work is a development or progress on my own reading and interpretation of the work of these poets, rather than the basis for their analysis.

The main hypothesis is that the poets studied here were concerned with what I call the presence of the poem in the world. As the title indicates, their concern is for its material presence. This moves in two directions, first the idea that poetry and art are based on the reality of its primary matter; for example, language in poetry. And second, that taking this consciousness about the materiality of the work will lead to reconsideration of its place in the world. The dichotomy of time-based art and space-based art is well known, its most famous exponent is Lessing's study *Laocoon*.⁷ The main idea is that arts such as poetry and music exist in time, while others like painting and sculpture exist in space. But at the end of the nineteenth century there was a schism in this order particularly in the work of French poet Stéphane Mallarmé *Un coup de dés*.⁸ There Mallarmé used typography of different size to express the idea of the poem, but he also used and drew attention to the blank spaces of the page. There is a classic tradition in poetry to shape the text in a particular form, such as a vase or a cross. But Mallarmé's poem is different. The shape of the poem and the use of the page do not intend to copy an object external to the poem itself. What *Un coup de dés* represents is the fragmentation and the movement of an idea. Later the historical avant-garde movements of the beginnings of the twentieth century attempted several ways in which this separation between time and space in literature could be broken. The collage is a good example of this. Marinetti's *Parole in libertà*, for example, attempted to break with the linearity of the written text, and unknowingly questioned the position

⁷ Lessing, G. E., *Laocoon: Or the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. by William Ross (London: Ridgway, 1836).

⁸ Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Un coup de dés', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mondor and G. Jean Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), pp. 455-477.

of the work of literature in the space outside the page.⁹ In Latin America Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro made very interesting and compelling experiments with the spatiality of the text and the page. And later on he would 'paint' some poems which he would display in an exhibition in Paris in 1922.¹⁰ The presence of the poem begins with this idea of the spatiality of the text in Modernist and avant-garde works.

The idea of time is present in any work that requires our reading, this is undeniable. However, when a text is organised based on the spatial relationships of words on a page such as is the case in concrete poetry, or organised to suggest a spatial form of the work as is the case of Oliverio Girondo then it is not time which is being denied but it is the addition of a spatial quality to the work which has prompted me to reassess the reality of those works. For the present context I understand the concept of avant-garde in poetry in relation to the innovation of poetic forms. Not out of simple need for the new but as William Rowe explains, to 'explore the capabilities of poetry in precisely those poets who have in specific and different ways expanded what a poem can do and therefore what it can offer to a reader.'¹¹ To break the temporal mould of the work out into spatiality is, I believe, a way of reinforcing the presence beyond of the work by inviting the reader to challenge his notions of poetry and reading itself. This is also a comment on the reality of the work. While a painting and a sculpture have a physical presence, the literary work of art has to be read in order to exist and as such belongs not to the outside world but to the reader's imagination. If conventional poetry was based on the internal experience of the imagination, then the reading experience of these works challenges the notion of time based interiority by suggesting the presence of the poem

⁹ Fillipo Tomaso Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax-Imagination without Strings-Words-in-Freedom', in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. and intro. by Umbro Apollonio, trans. by Robert Brian et al., afterword by Richard Humphreys (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2001), pp. 95-106.

¹⁰ Vicente Huidobro, 'Horizon Carré' and 'Une exposition de poèmes de Vincent Huidobro', in *Obra poética*, ed. by Cedomil Goic, Colección Archivos, 45 ([Madrid]: Colección Archivos, 2003), pp. 409-480.

¹¹ Rowe, 'Introduction', in *Poets of Contemporary Latin America*, p. 5.

in the reality of the outside world. As Argentinean writer Juan José Saer wrote: 'mi primera preocupación de escritor es, en consecuencia, esta crítica de lo que se presenta como real y a lo cual todo el resto debe estar subordinado.'¹² The comment on reality that is implicit in the writers discussed in this work is that by questioning the limits between object and subject such as in the case of Peruvian poet Jorge Eduardo Eielson the notion of reality is put into question and we as readers are made to reconsider our very basic ideas and relationships with what is considered reality. What these writers suggest is that their texts are exterior to the subject's inner life and therefore have, however limited, a different existence than the more conventional literary texts. As French composer Pierre Boulez wrote:

Modernity really begins, I think, with the rejection of the preconceived frame of reference. It's definitive and, I would say, a priori rejection. [...] for me, the concept of modernity involves first that state of circumstances in which thinking cannot be physically adapted to things as they exist, in which thought must invent, for expressive reasons, the formal structure of invention itself.¹³

I think that there is a clear line that unites the intentions and poetic need of these poets: to cross the boundaries of literary forms in time and to place or suggest the poem as an object in the world. What this basically means is a reconsideration of the role of poetry in the world. To give it presence again the changing times of modernity. By concentrating on the work of artists after the historical avant-garde movements I intend to signal a reiteration of the critical dimension of their work, as Scheunemann proposes 'the neo-avant-garde will fully live up to its name only when the reconnection with the past proves to be the

¹² Juan José Saer, 'La selva espesa de lo real', in *Una literatura sin atributos*, Cuadernos de extensión universitaria, 7 (Santa Fe, Argentina: Universidad nacional del litoral, 1986), pp. 7-11 (p. 8).

¹³ Pierre Boulez in conversation with Michel Fano, trans. by Thomas Repensek, in *October*, 15 (Fall, 1980), 101-120 (101).

motor to a distinct own advance of the practice and understanding of artistic production.¹⁴ Without calling the authors in this study neo-avant-garde, it is safe to place them as the followers or inheritors of the avant-garde tradition.

The first chapter of this work is dedicated to Oliverio Girondo. He is the poet who represents a link between the historical and the neo-avant-garde in Latin America. He took part in the Ultraist movement in the early twenties, but unlike Jorge Luis Borges, continued on his own path of poetic innovation and experimentation. This concluded with *En la masmedula* his most experimental work, which was published in the mid 1950s. It is with this book that this thesis is mainly concerned. If the early work of Girondo can be contextualised within a movement of the avant-garde, *En la masmedula* stands by its own with no connections to groups, theories or ideologies. In this work Girondo sets out to suggest a spatial form of the book as a whole created by the texts. He does this by working from the very fabric of language out to images and concepts. Girondo in this book works with repetition and accumulation of different particles of language that create the feeling of density. It is this virtual space that suggests that Girondo's poetry is concerned with space as well as time, not only as a subject or an idea but as the possibility for the poem to have a more real presence in the world. This requires a reorientation of the reader's way of reading and his relationship to language since Girondo is ultimately questioning the limitations between the world, the poem and the subject.

The second chapter is dedicated to Peruvian artist and writer Jorge Eduardo Eielson. Eielson began writing poetry early in his life, winning a Peruvian national poetry award when he was still only twenty one years old in 1945. But this poetry was full of symbolism and imagery that he would exchange later in life for a more direct presentation of the poem as an object and also in his artistic work. Eielson worked with different

¹⁴ Scheunemann, 'From Collage to the Multiple', p. 38.

media—poetry, painting, sculpture, theatre, fiction, performance—however in all of his work there are certain particular concerns revolving around the problem of presence and limits. This is the reason why I decided to explore the different media with which Eielson worked.

The third and final chapter is dedicated to the Brazilian Noigandres group of concrete poetry. This group first formed in the early fifties in the city of Sao Paulo. Their poetics are a direct response to the conservative atmosphere of the more dominating poetic trends in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, particularly from those poets known as the Generation of '45, who advocated a return to conventional poetic forms while their aesthetics looked back to French Symbolism. The concrete poets perform a revision of both the Brazilian but also world literature to seek out their models and the artists that were innovators of forms. With concrete poetry we encounter a fusion of time and space in the literary work. These poets were concerned not only with the space of the work but also with extracting the poem from the book. The concrete poem does not longer exist only in the mind of the reader but has like painting a real physical presence in the world. What these poets attempted was to place the poem in the world where events occur. These poets are concerned with the presence of the poem in the world and thus with the limitations of its form.

The poets analysed in the present work look at the problem of the poem and the world. Their solutions are different; Girondo attempted an opening towards a space which could tear down the walls separating the poem and the world; Eielson reflected on the presence of matter as an account of existence; and the concrete poets tried to place the poem back in everyday existence of man. Their relationship is based on their considerations about matter as that which gives form and presence to existence, and therefore, they ultimately are giving an account of the latter. What the work of these poets do, and this is something that has not been properly addressed by scholars, is to invite the reader to re-

consider the problems of presence regarding the literary work of art. It is up to the reader to accept the challenge to conventions that the works of these poets propose. For poetry demands an active and interpretative reading that explores and therefore activates the full potentiality of the text.¹⁵

¹⁵ Charles Bernstein writes about two different kinds of readers, those active and those reactive. The reactive reader, as its name indicates, reacts to what is given to him by the given text; while the active reader engages with the text in order to bring the text into existence, 'Artifice of Absorption', in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 9-89 (p. 9).

I

THE POEM'S SPACE: FORM AND LIMITS IN OLIVERIO GIRONDO'S *EN LA MASMÉDULA*

In his beginnings as a poet Oliverio Gironde was close to the Ultraist avant-garde movement led by Ramón Gómez de la Serna.¹⁶ Consequently, Gironde's first two books of poems were written under the influence of Ultraist aesthetics.¹⁷ However, this is not all they have to offer, in these books, *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía* (1922) and *Calcomanías* (1925), Gironde reveals his poetry as a radical reflexion about the world and himself. For instance, we can infer from the title of the first book that one of his concerns was his own place in the world. The creative basis of these works seems to rely on the use of images and metaphors.¹⁸ What these early books convey is a poetic vision that keeps the world at a certain distance, with a poet who acts more as witness than agent. Francine Masiello places these efforts in a modernist tradition where she identifies a superficial element in writing that 'al tejer nuevos modos de representar al mundo, introduce un modo visual en la literatura que promueve relaciones alternativas entre sujeto y objeto y lleva toda percepción a la superficie de las cosas.'¹⁹ This was only the beginning. I believe that Gironde became aware of this problematic relation between objects and subjects and in his later poetry, more

¹⁶ Linda S. Maier, *Borges and the European Avant-Garde* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 30.

¹⁷ Trinidad Barrera, "El gaucho que ataba a lazo las greguerías criollas": Oliverio Gironde en España durante la década de los veinte', in *OC*, pp. 445-453.

¹⁸ Jorge Luis Borges as one of the leaders and theorist of the Argentinean Ultraist movement described in the essay 'Ultraismo' that one of the main points of their aesthetics was the metaphor, in Jorge Luis Borges, in *Textos recuperados 1919-1929* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1997), pp. 126-131 (p. 128).

¹⁹ Masiello, 'Oliverio Gironde: naturaleza y artificio', trans. by Ana Cecilia Arias Olmos, in *OC*, pp. 404-416 (p. 407).

clearly since *Interlunio* (1937), the surface of things and the superficial character of human interaction and knowledge both of others and of oneself became a focal point in his work. It is on Gironde's concern with surfaces that I begin my inquiry into his poetry; particularly, on his attempts to go beyond the surface in search of the essence of things. I think this is why in his latter poetry there is a concern with space. This becomes clear in both the long poem 'Campo nuestro' (1946) and in *En la masmédula* (1953-1956). It is on this last book that the present chapter will concentrate.

Gironde's poetical development remained coherent throughout his life.²⁰ Up to the culmination of his poetic production with the highly experimental book *En la masmédula* he kept moving forward in search of a poetic form that would grant him access to what lay behind the surface of things. This could be the reason why Gironde considered his last work to be his true achievement as a poet. In a letter to Juan Carlos Ghiano, dated in Buenos Aires on the 26 August of 1955, Gironde explains:

En cuanto a su comentario sobre *En la masmédula* le diré que no estoy de acuerdo, principalmente, en aquello de que "olvidé tanto al poeta de *Persuasión de los días*", pues el primero es, a todas luces, un *ahondamiento formal y espiritual del segundo*. Tampoco puedo estar de acuerdo, después de esto, en su valoración de ambos libros, porque no sólo considero que *En la Masmédula* es muchísimo superior a *Persuasión*, sino que es el único libro mío que realmente—y relativamente—me satisface.²¹

This book is the final product of a lifetime dedicated to the reflection of the problems of poetic form, the difficulties of expression, as

²⁰ Jorge Schwartz, 'The Moremarrow Trajectory of Oliverio Gironde', in K. David Jackson, Eric Vos & Johanna Drucker, *Experimental—Visual—Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry since the 1960s* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 73-90.

²¹ In Jorge Schwartz, ed., *Homenaje a Gironde* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1987), pp. 244-245. My emphasis.

well as a crystallisation of a way of existing and thinking about reality. But above all else, I believe that with *En la masmedula* Gironde created a book of poems whose structural pattern suggests a spatial form; a virtual space that allowed the interpenetration between the interiority of the poet and the exteriority of the world thus simulating a transgression of surfaces.²² In this book the limits of what is exterior and what is interior are bridged. It is the purpose of this chapter to first, reveal the structural pattern of *En la masmedula* through which the spatial form is suggested; and second, once this form has been properly ascertained, to explore the dynamic between interiority and exteriority in some poems of this book. This will ultimately show that the search for a spatial form was not just out of want for the new, but rather for a form that would represent Gironde's conception of human existence.

In 1945 in *The Sewanee Review* Joseph Frank published an essay entitled 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature.'²³ The main thesis of Frank's essay is that modern writers such as Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Barnes 'intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence.'²⁴ He links this intention with Pound's definition of the image: 'an Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.'²⁵ What Frank is taking from Pound's description of the image is the reader's perception of a poetic work as a whole or gestalt. This takes place when interacting elements such as images or concepts accumulated in the mind *along* the reading

²² Régis Bonvicino considers *En la masmedula* as one single long poem divided in sections, I agree, 'Antes que se dilate a pupila do zero', in *A pupila do zero/En la masmedula*, ed. and trans. by Régis Bonvicino (Sao Paulo: Iluminuras, 1995), pp. 9-18 (p. 9).

²³ Joseph Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature', in *The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature*, ed. and intro. by Richard Kostelanetz (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1982), pp. 43-77.

²⁴ Frank, 'Spatial Form', p. 46. This article sparked an intense academic debate, in the following papers the reader will find a history of the academic reception of Frank's essay: G. Giovannini, 'Method in the Study of Literature in Its Relations to the Other Fine Arts', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 8 (1950), 185-195; Walter Sutton, 'The Literary Image and the Reader: A Reconsideration of Spatial Form', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 16 (1957), 112-123; William Holtz, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature: A Reconsideration', *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1977), 271-283; Joseph Frank, 'Spatial Form: An Answer to Critics', *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1977), 231-252; Frank Kermode, 'A Reply to Joseph Frank', *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1978), 579-588.

²⁵ Quoted in Frank, 'Spatial Form', p. 46; Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. and intro. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), pp. 3-14 (p. 4).

suddenly reveal an underlying structural pattern which in turn evokes the work's spatial form. Frank describes this in the following way:

Aesthetic form in modern poetry, then, is based on a space-logic that demands a complete reorientation in the reader's attitude toward language. Since the primary reference of any word-group is to something inside the poem itself, language in modern poetry is really reflexive. The meaning-relationship is completed only by the simultaneous perception in space of word-groups that have no comprehensible relation to each other when read consecutively in time. Instead of the instinctive and immediate reference of words and word-groups to the objects or events they symbolize and the construction of meaning from the sequence of these references, modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity.²⁶

Based on Bernstein's hermeneutic principle—active and reactive readers—that I mentioned during the introduction to this thesis, Frank's notion of reorientation proves highly significant to the present context. If poetry, as Bernstein believes, demands an active reading process then reorientation in modern poetry gives ground to this reading principle because the spatial form is mainly a psychological phenomenon that requires such an active reader. It is in the mind of the reader where the apprehension of the poem's spatial form takes place. Therefore the reader of modern poetry cannot be complacent and must approach the work not looking to confirm his or her standard of what poetry is or what it is supposed to deliver to the reader. Rather, the reader of modern poetry should keep his or her mind open and actively engage the work on its own terms since it is on the terms being laid down by the work along

²⁶ Frank, 'Spatial Form', p. 49.

the reading that the structural pattern, which will expose the work's sense, can be apprehended.

In a later essay Frank compares his idea of 'space-logic' with Jakobson's theory of poetic language, particularly the idea of the 'poetic function'.²⁷ This is the function of language that is oriented toward the message itself rather than to the context, i.e. referential function; or the addresser, i.e. emotive function; or the addressee, i.e. conative function. It is the 'dominance of the message itself' in the poetic function of language where Frank finds a correspondence with his idea of space-logic since it is in the message itself where the structural pattern is formed.²⁸ And as we will see in the third chapter of the present work, Jakobson's concept of 'poetic function' will prove essential to the poetics of the concrete poets in their search for their works' theoretical grounding. The correspondence between Jakobson's 'poetic function' and Frank's 'space-logic' rests in the self-reflexiveness of poetic language; that is, the message finds its primary referents within itself. Here the connection between language and external referents is pushed to a secondary plane and as a result the sense of the text falls on its own structure. This could account for Frank's sentence that 'word-groups have no comprehensible relation to each other when read consecutively in time', since the referent of the 'word-groups' is the very structural pattern that they are themselves forming. However, Frank's argument for the suspension of the temporal dimension in literature presents us with an aporia since reading presupposes time. It is on this point where most of his critics have focused their arguments: 'an almost universal objection is that spatial form is a "mere metaphor" [...] and that it denies the essentially temporal nature of literature.'²⁹ It is true that the basic temporal aspect of reading—even before story or plot—cannot be extracted from the act

²⁷ Joseph Frank, 'Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections', *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1979), 275-290 (pp. 279-281); Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings III: Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, ed. with a preface by Stephen Rudy (Paris: Mouton, 1981), pp. 169-176.

²⁸ Frank, 'Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections', p. 280.

²⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (1980), 539-567 (p. 541).

itself. This is true even of poetic expressions such as concrete poetry which are partly based on the immediate apprehension of the external image of the printed page. On the other hand, Frank did not propose that the whole essence of literature and reading were different in the particular authors he analyses, but that their work presented specific demands for the reader; among them the temporal suspension of words' individual references. This is something similar to Coleridge's principle of 'suspension of disbelief'. There the reader accepts the work's premises in order to have an aesthetic or literary experience.³⁰ Another objection to Frank's idea of 'space logic' can be aimed at his argument about the reflexivity of modern poetic language since this implies deferring language's connections with everyday reality. In the modern American poetic tradition of which Frank is writing about there is an intended direct correspondence between language and things. For some of those poets, this correspondence is partially the basis for the strength in their poetic values. The relationship of language to particulars is clear, for example, in William Carlos Williams 'no ideas but in things' and Pound's efforts to explain his theory of poetry in relation to the concrete world and against the use of abstract notions: 'go in fear of abstractions', he emphasised.³¹ Nevertheless, the idea is not that words cease to have their external referents as it could be at first assumed but rather that the interaction between the word-groups formed within the work expose their full connotations. However, these objections do not impinge on what I see are Frank's two most significant propositions: first, that there is a 'simultaneous perception in space of word-groups'; and second, that 'modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity.' Although Frank's main concern is Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood* (1937), I believe that it is in modernist and

³⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XIV.

³¹ William Carlos Williams, 'A Sort of Song', in *Selected Poems*, intro. by Randall Jarrell (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 108-109; Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', p. 5.

Avant-Garde lyric poetry where his notion of spatial form is most applicable, mainly because the language of these texts contains little narrative, story, or plot.

One of the key accomplishments of Oliverio Girondo's *En la masmédula* is the configuration of its own structural pattern that evokes a spatial form. This works in the following way, the book's fundamental structural pattern is created by the repetition and accumulation of different elements of language on three different levels: a) phones, phonemes, and syllables; b) morphemes; and c) images. It is in the simultaneous apprehension of the structural pattern that these groups form that the spatial form is suggested. This multi-level—or three-dimensional—structural pattern supports the evocation of spatiality. The accumulation of these aural and visual elements builds up meaning through space in a way that is not dependent on a linear narrative. That is, Girondo is not using language to tell the reader a story that takes place in time but rather he is using language to construct an experience for the reader.

I diverge from Frank's theory at this point. In *En la masmédula* the different elements of speech mentioned above are essential components of the book's structural pattern, unlike Frank's theory which is based on the apprehension of 'word-groups', and not the smaller units of speech. The apprehension of the different groups of linguistic elements is essential to *En la masmédula's* structural pattern and thus to its spatial form. These groups are interconnected. However, none of them has precedence over the others; none is more important than others, since all of them to a greater or lesser extent construct the book's structural pattern. There is a concept that can help visualise this interconnectedness: the rhizome. The characteristics of the rhizome that it suggests a space; that it is not hierarchical; and that it is formed by connections which can be extensive but that can also end abruptly, is a useful theoretical tool that can help us to visualise and understand the intricate

interconnections of the different groups of speech in *En la masmedula*.³² Particularly in the way the three different levels of speech—acoustic, verbal, and visual—interact with each other.

The answer to the question about why Girondo created this form can be found in the notion regarding the presence of the poem in the world. To suggest the creation of the poem's space immediately opens the question of its localisation. In a way the answer is straight forward: in the mind, the imagination of the reader. Yet according to Frank 'depth, the projection of three-dimensional space, gives objects a time-value because it places them in the real world in which events occur.'³³ Frank meant this statement to contrast with the push of non-naturalistic art, where modern literature would be placed linked to mythical thinking as opposed to the historical thinking of nineteenth century narrative. However, this could also suggest that the preoccupation of modern and avant-garde writers with the spatial qualities of their works indicated a need to 'insert' them into 'the real world'. Both the Concrete Poets and Jorge Eduardo Eielson were preoccupied with the presence of the poem and thus with the limitations of its form. The concrete poets extracted the poem from the internal timed based experience of the ego by placing the poem in a constant ambiguity: it is external for it is on the page but at the same time it also continues to be the internal experience of the reader. Eielson explored the limits of different media to place the work of art in *the real world in which events occur*. It is not the passing of time that these poets are struggling against but the limitations of the time-based form of poetry which is inherently interior.

As I said earlier, the following chapter aims to reveal the structural pattern of *En la masmedula* through which the spatial form is suggested. Once this is established, I will explore the dynamic between interiority and exteriority in some poems of this book. These issues have so far

³² Jorge Schwartz had previously made the connection between *En la masmedula* and the figure of the rhizome. However, his perspective is based on the idea of Girondo's book as a neo-baroque expression. I address this issue further along this chapter.

³³ Frank, 'Spatial Form', p. 74.

been outside the scope of most critics of this work who mainly concentrate on the book's experimental language. But I believe that this analysis is crucial to the proper understanding of this complex work and to the furthering of this field of research.

1.

Oliverio Gironde's *En la masmédula* is formed by a structural pattern which in its turn is constructed by the repetition and accumulation of elements into groups at three different levels of the text: phonetic, grammatical, and visual. In *En la masmédula* the groups on each different level of the text can be 'mapped' on the other 'corresponding' levels. This correspondence constructs the structural pattern of the book. The groups, although different in length and covering diverse areas of the book, contribute to create the simultaneous compositional effect. The different levels respond to a spatial paradigm. Because of their connections to the paradigm the different levels can be considered as isomorphic. The isomorphism of these levels is not necessarily out of equality between the groups of each level as out of a similarity of behaviour of the groups within each particular level; i.e. how do these groups interrelate with each other. The term isomorphism derives from the Greek *iso* meaning 'equal' and *morphosis* meaning 'to form' or 'to shape', thus we will see that each particular level forms a similar shape in a similar way as the other two levels. Isomorphic can also be defined as a transformation destined to preserve information.³⁴ The transformation occurs from one level to the next based on the repetition and accumulation varies from phonetic to morphemic to visual groups. However, the information that these different groups aim to communicate remains the same, the spatial paradigm which they mean to communicate. What this information is will be the focus of the first section of this chapter. The present analysis of *En la masmédula* is based on the

³⁴ Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: un eterno y grácil bucle*, trans. by Mario A. Usabiaga and others, 6th edn (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1998), p. 57.

argument that the composition of the book is constructed by the formation of groups at three different levels of the text, and that these levels are to some extent isomorphic. The levels will ultimately form a structural pattern which, when they are 'apprehended' simultaneously, suggests the spatial form. This 'simultaneous apprehension' of the spatial form is something similar to what Dámaso Alonso understood as the *total image* of a work: 'la intuición de la obra es una imagen total'.³⁵ Alonso's intuition of a total image corresponds with Frank's apprehension of the work's unity, they both speak of a literary experience in a moment of time. The 'imagen total' of *En la masmédula* is a spatial form.

'IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SOUND'³⁶

In Gironde's *En la masmédula* the phonetic level of the text comes to the forefront of our interaction as readers to the extent that 'las repeticiones fónicas ya no pueden considerarse ajenas a la producción de sentido'.³⁷ Consequently the language of *En la masmédula* is far from being composed of jitanjáforas, as Miguel Ángel Asturias proposed in his review of the book in 1955.³⁸ The phonetic level of *En la masmédula* completes, reiterates, and expands the overall meaning of the book: 'la palabra entra en relaciones que, en vez de reducir o encerrar su poder poético, como en el discurso lógico, tienden a liberarlo, dotándolo de una coherencia nueva, inventiva'.³⁹ These relationships that Bayley mentions do not respond to the progress of the semantic chain of the phrase alone. The full connotations of words in Gironde's book are activated by the rhizomic web of relationships formed between the different levels of the text. For example, these can be taken to be the repetition and

³⁵ Dámaso Alonso, *Poesía española: ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos*, Biblioteca Románica Hispánica II, Estudios y Ensayos, 1, 5th edn (Madrid: Gredos, 1966; repr. 1993), p. 40.

³⁶ Tom Leonard, 'In the Beginning was the Sound', in *Silent Voices: Selected Work 1965-1983* (Buckfastleigh: Etruscan, 2003), no p.

³⁷ Dardo Scavino, 'Mimofonías. En la masmédula de Gironde o la ficción de la lengua', *Bulletin Hispanique*, 2 (2005), 519-544 (p. 543).

³⁸ Miguel Ángel Asturias, 'En la masmédula', in *OC*, p. 655. A jitanjáfora is a linguistic expression lacking semantic meaning.

³⁹ Edgar Bayley, 'Realidad interna y función de la poesía', in *Obras*, ed. by Julia Saltzmann (Buenos Aires: Grijalbo, 1999), pp. 613-672 (p. 621).

accumulation of allophone groups within different poems or different sections of a particular poem. Each of these allophone groups forms a small pattern and all of these small patterns form a larger phonetic pattern that repeats the isomorphic principle of organisation.

Ezra Pound wrote that 'poetry is a composition or an "organisation" of words set to "music"'.⁴⁰ By music Pound did not mean the instrumental accompaniment of a song. Rather he meant rhythm—a recurring alternating pattern of contrasting aural elements—within the language of a particular composition.⁴¹ But most importantly, he connected the musical aspect of poetry with sense: 'the rhythm form is false unless it belongs to the particular creative emotion or energy which it purports to represent'.⁴² Before the printed text, which traditionally was not part of the poem, sound had been language's concrete aspect. Enunciation is a basic actualisation of language. It is one way in which the language of our reading exits the page into the world. As it moves through time sound is the element that drives the poem forward. This is the basic principle for Lessing's division of the arts. This actualisation of the poem in the world is an ephemeral phenomenon. Nevertheless, just as in music, the poem would not be 'complete' unless read aloud. 'Speech' writes Reuven Tsur:

Consists of several parallel streams of information. At the listeners end, we translate a stream of acoustic information into a stream of phonetic information, which in turn we translate into a stream of semantic representations, and so forth.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ezra Pound, 'Affirmations: As for Imagisme', in *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. and intro. by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 344-347 (p. 345).

⁴¹ Pound, 'Affirmations', p. 345.

⁴² Pound, 'Affirmations', p. 345. He further divided poetry in three types: *melopœia*, *phanopœia* and *logopœia*. In the first of these are found the poetic compositions which stress the acoustic element to form meaning, the 'musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning', 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays*, ed. with intro. by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 15-40 (pp. 25-26) p. 25.

⁴³ Reuven Tsur, 'Rhyme and Cognitive Poetics', in *Poetics Today*, 17 (1996) 55-87 (p. 57). Tsur is one of the principal developers of the cognitive poetics theory at the Hebrew University in Tel Aviv. Cognitive poetics is based on the analysis of the 'perceived' elements in poetry; that is the elements in poetry that are not necessarily conceptual.

The 'parallel streams of information' are indeed similar to what I have called levels of the text. The main difference lies in what the metaphors suggest, while 'stream' suggests a matter flowing through time, levels suggest more the space that the levels are forming. In *En la masmécula* the 'stream of acoustic information' is heightened to extreme degrees. Following the metaphor of the stream, *En la masmécula* would be closer to the rapids zone of a river rather than to its estuary. The overcharge of acoustic information seems even to bridge the silence between words creating a feeling of saturation.⁴⁴ That is, within one poem, or within a number of lines of a poem, the reader encounters the repetition of phonemes, syllables, and sometimes words that form what could be called a 'wall of sound'. In the first poem of the book 'La mezcla', we find the following example:

la total mezcla plena
 la pura impura mezcla que me merma los machimbres el almamasa tensa
 las [tercas hembras
 tuercas
 la mezcla (p. 219)

We can dissect this example by looking at the different patterns formed repetition of distinctive phonetic elements. First we can see the repetition of the phonemes /l/, /t/, /e/, and /a/. The repetition of the phoneme /l/ is particularly clear in the first line of the quoted example: '/l/a tota/l/ mezc/l/a p/l/ena'. It is in this line where we find the other phonemes: 'la /t/o/t/al mezcla plena'; 'la total m/e/zcla pl/e/na'; and 'l/a/ tot/a/l mezcl/a/ plen/a/'. The presence of these phonemes is also

⁴⁴ The effect of sounds bridging silence is created by the 'directions' in which the sounds interconnect. The sounds that create the rhythm do not only link with forward elements as it more likely to happen in a regular rhythmical pattern. Sound particles link as much with contiguous elements as is with elements throughout the poem and even the book. This creates the effect of acoustical interconnection and also emphasises the perception of spatiality since it is not only in time that the acoustic elements seem to exist but at different 'parts' of the book.

found throughout the rest of the example, like /t/ in 'tensa', 'tercas', and 'tuercas'. Also the repetition of vowels creates a strong assonance. Moving on to the repetition of syllables we find that 'me' and 'ma' are particularly strong in this segment: 'mezcla que me merma los machimbres el almamasa'. In this example there is also a repetition of words 'pura' and 'mezcla' that contain the phones [p] and [m] which also create a pattern within the example. The [p] is present in 'plena', but the connections between 'pura' and 'impura' and the rest of the poem do not cease there. Within 'impura' lies the phone [m] which can be connected to 'mezcla', 'me', 'merma', 'machimbres', 'almamasa', 'hembras'. As we can see from this example, the reader faces a tightly connected text. In the poem 'Gristenia'(p. 240) the reader finds the following:

rodado de hueco sino dado de dado ya tan dado
y su yo solo oscuro de pozo lodo adentro y microcosmos tinto por la total
[girstenia]

In this example the reader finds that the repetition of the phonemes /d/, /s/, /a/, and /o/ forms a dense phonetic texture. Here there is a clear example of how the isomorphic levels of the text function. On a first level we face the repetition of the syllables 'da' and 'do', which form the word 'dado' which in its turn is repeated three times. The word 'dado' can have different connotations. It can refer to a cube, and therefore to a dice. It can also be the participle of the verb 'dar', like a situation that is given: 'dada la situación etc.', for example. This last connotation is not gratuitous since 'dado' is preceded by the word 'sino', i.e. fate, destiny; thus a given fate or destiny. This could be the destiny of individuals in the history of mankind. But 'dado' can also mean dice. In this case it would be a reference to Mallarmé's groundbreaking poem *Un coup de dés*. This is a poem that speaks of fate and chance: 'Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard'. So within the given fate of the individual

to repeat the actions of other individuals within humankind there is still the presence of chance which can alter the course of a life. The image of the movement of the roll of the dice is echoed by the repetition of the word 'dado'. Therefore there is here a contrast between given fate and chance. The rolling dice can decide which one will be assigned to the player.

In the poem 'Hasta morirla'(p. 242) we read:

amor gorgóneo médium olavacabracobra deliquio erecto entero
que ulululululula y arpegialibaraña el ego soplo centro

This is an example of the saturation of the stream of acoustic information. The first two words 'amor gorgóneo' repeat the phoneme /o/, while the words 'erecto', 'entero', and 'centro' repeat /r/ and /e/, and 'deliquio', 'olavacabracobra', 'arpegialibaraña', and 'ulululululula' repeat /l/, /i/, /u/, and /a/. There is also a repetition of syllables in 'olavacabracobra' and 'arpegialibaraña', where 'bra' and 'ar' are present in both words. It is not my intention to carry on with a full analysis of these elements in the poems of *En la mas médula*. This would be indeed an interesting endeavour but one that would lead me astray from my main objective of establishing the existence of phonetic groups.

As I have said, the reader initially faces something like a 'wall of sound' that seems to obstruct the reader from moving on to the other levels of the poem: 'lo que quiere imperar en estos textos es su espacio material'.⁴⁵ There is an expansion, an infringement of the acoustic materiality of the poems upon the other textual levels. The 'wall of sound' can be seen as a baroque image in the sense of overabundance. This would also be a helpful aid for visualising what Gironde has done at the level of sound in *En la mas médula*: 'pulpo yo en mudo nudo de saca y

⁴⁵ Tamara Kamenszain, 'Doblando a Gironde', in *El texto silencioso: tradición y vanguardia en la poesía sudamericana* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1983), pp. 15-24 (p. 16).

pon gozón en don más don tras dón' ('Tantan yo', p. 256).⁴⁶ The strength of the sound pattern creates a vivid acoustic image. Tsur writes that a 'phonetic coding consists in substituting an abstract phonetic category for the acoustic information that transmitted it from the speaker to the hearer' so that 'the longer the delay in categorization, the richer the precategorical sensory information that becomes available to a person and the fuller the body of sound patterns perceived'.⁴⁷ Indeed, Tsur's image of 'body of sound patterns' illustrates well what I mean since what I am arguing for is the 'presence' of sound. Sound, as Tsur's stresses, has a physical reality that occupies space, even though the temporal dimension is the one we pay most attention to. Therefore when we read the poems aloud and thus actualise the phonetic information into acoustic information the 'body of sound' becomes present.

Throughout *En la masmédula* the reader faces sound patterns saturated with 'precategorical sensory information' such as 'en toda forma hundido polimellado adrroto a ras afaz subrripio cocopleonasma exorto' ('Al gravitar rotanto', pp. 221). The effect achieved is what Tsur understands as 'delay in categorization' which accentuates the physical acoustic existence of the poem because our attention is taken over by a saturation of sound that delays our translation from acoustic information into visual and conceptual information. According to André Spire the acoustic images of words—i.e. sound vibrations—have a specific physical impact on our bodies.⁴⁸ Such effect increases the suggestion of a spatial notion since it gives the reader a physical actualisation of the reading. This produces something that Edward Snyder calls 'hypnotic poetry' which is directly connected with the sound of the poem; that is, it cannot be experienced during a silent reading.⁴⁹ Tsur quotes Snyder about this

⁴⁶ The presence of these patterns have stirred critics like Jorge Schwartz to interpret *En la masmédula* as a neo-baroque expression, and thus linking it with poets such as José Lezama Lima and Oswald de Andrade, Schwartz, 'The Moremarrow Trajectory of Oliverio Gironde', pp. 77-87.

⁴⁷ Tsur, 'Rhyme and Cognitive Poetics', p. 63.

⁴⁸ André Spire, *Plaisir Poétique et Plaisir Musculaire: Essai sur l'Evolution des Techniques Poétiques* ([Paris]: Jose Corti, 1949), pp. 34-37.

⁴⁹ Edward Douglas Snyder, *Hypnotic Poetry: A Study of Trance Inducing Technique in Certain Poems and Its Literary Significance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930), p. 16.

phenomenon where readers facing 'a number of poems by Poe, Coleridge, and others, [...] are inclined to "attend away" from the meaning of the words and to become "spell-bound" by their sound(s).'⁵⁰ This is what I have called 'wall of sound'. In Girondo's book the acoustic image seems at first to have even a stronger presence than the visual images suggested by the text. The saturated sound level of *En la masmédula* makes the reader actively confront the materiality of the sound patterns. Not, however, as a problem but as a poetic mechanism that needs to be activated. The physical presence of sound in the poems makes readers 'attend away' from the meaning because the sound patterns seem to engulf the subsequent levels of the text. Even though this is not necessarily true, I think that this could be a reason why some critics like Asturias have thought of this composition as made up mainly of jitanjáforas. But this presence suggested by the sounds forms a series of interconnected acoustic nodules that begin to form something like a rhizome. If the phonetic patterns in *En la masmédula* form a 'body of sounds', this would suggest that the acoustic effect of these poems is not only temporal but also spatial. As the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard wrote: 'it is in space that we find duration beautifully preserved and made real.'⁵¹

The phonetic and acoustic repetitions in these poems form patterns just like more traditional poetry is based on repetition that also forms patterns: rhymes and feet.⁵² However, in *En la masmédula* it is the volume, and the apparent chaos, of the patterns that makes the difference on the effect. The aural saturation is playing directly to the

⁵⁰ Tsur, 'Rhyme and Cognitive Poetics', p. 61.

⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'Espace*, quoted in Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Topophilia: Personal Encounters with the Landscape', in *Man, Space, and Environment: Concepts in Contemporary Human Geography*, ed. by Paul Ward English and Robert C. Mayfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 534-538 (p. 535).

⁵² Interestingly Martín Greco has written an interesting essay in which one of his primary hypothesis is that Girondo, even in *En la masmédula*, based his poems in traditional meters of seven and eleven syllables, 'El "infrafondo eufónico", estudio de la métrica de Oliverio Girondo', in Carlos García and Dieter Reichardt, eds., *Las vanguardias literarias en Argentina, Uruguay y Paraguay: bibliografía y antología crítica* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2004), pp. 378-414.

deepest and most primary sense, hearing.⁵³ Daniel Barenboim says that 'the ear remembers, the ear recollects, and that shows you one of the most important elements of expression in music, one of repetition and accumulation.'⁵⁴ The principle of repetition and accumulation in music is rooted in memory to give form to a particular piece. A difference between listening to music and reading a printed book is that for the latter there is the possibility of moving back and forth between passages at will. This revision would, in theory, aid the memory of the reader to create a stronger, clearer picture of the poetic composition. Edgar Bayley calls this body of sounds in *En la masmédula* a 'conjunción de fonocidad con densidad.'⁵⁵ This density is the product of 'una especie de explosión de la estructura silábica de las palabras y su significado convencional.'⁵⁶ There is an emphasis on the linguistic material, on sound. Bayley's image of the explosion may seem too poetical at first, but it illustrates well the dynamism of language vis-à-vis sense because it is from the sound outwards that the poems are formed in an induction from the particularities of sound out to images and concepts.

The 'body of sound' is formed throughout the book by the accumulation of phonetic and acoustic patterns that form the aural level of the text. As I have just argued, this level has a dominating presence in *En la masmédula*. The reader's memory stores these accumulating aural patterns to form the whole level, which do not only give a notion of time due to their natural consecutiveness but also begin to suggest a notion of space through the simultaneity of sound patterns. This is what I understand by Tsur's 'body of sound'. The notion of space implied in the mass and volume of a body that the image suggests that the notion of spatiality, if ultimately formed by the combination of the three levels, it is contained also in each particular level of the text.

⁵³ Daniel Barenboim, 'The Neglected Sense', *BBC Radio 4 2006 Reith Lectures* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2006/lecture2.shtml>> [accessed 8 February 2007].

⁵⁴ Barenboim, 'The Neglected Sense'.

⁵⁵ Edgar Bayley, 'Estado de alerta y estado de inocencia', in *Obras*, pp. 673-731 (p. 723).

⁵⁶ Bayley, 'Estado de alerta y estado de inocencia', p. 723.

While reading *En la masmédula* paying particular attention to the aural level of the text it seems as if the repetitions that form that level were driving the poetic thought forward. Critics like Enrique Molina have remarked on the correspondence between the sound in the poems and the objects, situations or events evoked.⁵⁷ Molina takes the opening poem of the book to illustrate his thought: 'no sólo/ el fofo fondo' (p. 219). To him this exemplifies the idea that the acoustic effect of those two lines 'sugiere un ruido sordo de hongos que revientan, de algo esponjoso, blanduzco, donde se hunden los pasos'.⁵⁸ For Molina the acoustic effect is evoking the image presented by the poem. Aldo Pellegrini wrote that 'en Gironde hay una verdadera sensualidad de la palabra como sonido, pero más que eso todavía, una búsqueda de la secreta homología entre sonido y significado'.⁵⁹ The repetition and accumulation of phonetic and acoustic elements in *En la masmédula* produces what I have called the aural level of the book. This in its turn has the effect of suggesting the idea of a 'body of sound'; that is the physical presence of sound. It is here where the spatial form of the book begins to be formed.

THE GRAMMATICAL IMAGE OF EN LA MASMÉDULA

In an essay on the *Finnegans Wake* Eugene Jolas wrote that: 'the real metaphysical problem today is the word. The epoch when the writer photographed the life about him [...] is drawing to its close. The new artist of the word has recognized the autonomy of language'.⁶⁰ For the writers following these developments in literature during the first half of the twentieth century words were liberated from their usual connections

⁵⁷ Enrique Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central o la poesía de Oliverio Gironde', in Oliverio Gironde, *Obras: poesía*, 8th edn (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1998), pp. 9-48 (pp. 42-43).

⁵⁸ Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central', p. 42.

⁵⁹ Aldo Pellegrini, 'La poesía de Gironde', in *Oliverio Gironde* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1964), pp. 17-36 (p. 33).

⁶⁰ Eugene Jolas, 'The Revolution of Language and James Joyce', in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, James Joyce/Finnegans Wake: A Symposium* (New York: New Directions, 1972), pp. 79-92 (p. 79). The first edition of this work is dated in 1929 when the *Finnegans Wake* was still known as *Work in Progress*. *Finnegans Wake* in book form, and under that title, was published in 1939.

with the objects they were supposed to name allowing a more faithful examination of the flux of man's inner world.⁶¹ These linguistic experiments and explorations, particularly the fragmentation of language, are for scholars like Anna Katharina Schaffner 'profoundly disturbing because they undermine and put into play the most basic concord about not only linguistic, but in fact all orders.'⁶² Indeed, the proposed change was profound, directed not only towards the celebration of the 'new' but towards the very structure of thought and universal order. However, I do not find this negative. Although it did mean the loss of macro-structures of meaning, these changes allowed a liberation of consciousness that points towards the possibility of a more open and honest relationship between man, the world, and himself. In this sense, it is pertinent to remember that for Hugh Kenner the revolution in the arts which began to materialise during the last decades of the nineteenth century had as big an impact in the perception of the world as Einstein's theory of relativity had for the understanding of the universe: 'the fragmenting of the aesthetic idea into allotropic images, as first theorized by Mallarmé, was a discovery whose importance for the artist corresponds to that of nuclear fission for the physicist.'⁶³ By 1914 Apollinaire, based on his poetic experiments, but also on new media such as the newspaper, was arguing for a necessary revolution in thought: 'it will be necessary for our intelligence to accustom itself to understand synethetico-ideographically instead of analytico-discursively.'⁶⁴ Only for years later Ezra Pound was editing the notes left by Professor Ernst Fenollosa on Chinese characters which would become an essential study for Pounds poetics and which explores similar ideas based on the ideogram. Experimental writing thus sought to embody the dynamism of the transforming world but also of a

⁶¹ Jolas, 'The Revolution of Language', p. 84. This separation from the referent began, according to Foucault in the eighteenth century, see *Las palabras y las cosas: una arqueología de las ciencias humanas*, trans. by Elsa Cecilia Frost, 26th edn (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1998), pp. 288-294.

⁶² Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Assaulting the Order of Signs: Language Dissection in Avant-Garde Poetry' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2005), p. 278.

⁶³ Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 262.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Margaret Davis, *Apollinaire* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 243.

new kind of sensibility which presented uncharted psychic and emotional states that had so far been subjugated to the regulations of logic and syntax. This new language sought, among other things, to recreate the processes of perception, imagination, and thought:

Joyce, realizing *since years* that minds do not think in sentences, that the subconscious does not think or feel in ideas, but in images, and these images not consecutive or related to our as yet unscientific understanding of psychology, surely wished to break though[sic] language to give it greater flexibility and nuance.⁶⁵

From the beginning Gironde was interested in this kind of poetics. As he wrote in a letter published as the prologue to his first book *Veinte poemas*: 'lo único realmente interesante es el mecanismo de sentir y de pensar' ('Carta abierta a La Púa', p. 6). This letter was published in 1922, the year of the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and still far from the truly ground breaking experimental poems of *En la masmédula*. However, I think that Gironde never stopped searching for a language that could embody that 'mecanismo', and therefore the spirit of that letter remained present throughout his work.⁶⁶

A hypothetical association could be drawn between the linguistic experiments of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Gironde's *En la masmédula*, particularly in the fusion of different fragments of language—languages in the case of the *Finnegans Wake*—to form new expressions.⁶⁷ McAlmon writes that language for Joyce 'does not mean the English language; it means a medium capable of suggestion, implication, and evocation; a

⁶⁵ Robert McAlmon, 'Mr. Joyce Directs an Irish Word Ballet', in *Our Exagmination*, pp. 105-116 (p. 106).

⁶⁶ From this angle of Avant-Garde poetry the exception to this continuous exploration is the long poem *Campo nuestro*. However, this poem responds to Gironde's movement away from the urban out towards the Earth as signalled in *Interlunio*. *Campo nuestro* deviates from the rest of Gironde's production in its use of language which is more literary and traditional.

⁶⁷ This comparison could be taken further. Both *Finnegans Wake* and *En la masmédula* are arguably nocturnal works; that is, they are connected with the subconscious through images of night, dreams and sleep. Also, both are subsequent to works that deal with daytime and clarity, the *Ulysses* and *Persuasión de los días*.

medium as free as any medium should be'.⁶⁸ I think that this sentence can be used to think about Girondo as well because the elements of suggestion, implication, and evocation due to the density of its language are what the reader experiences in *En la masmédula*. In these experiments lie the possibilities of exploring uncharted universes; Girondo created not so much a 'medium of communication' as an environment, a milieu:

To speak of a necessary relationship between the poem and what is not known is to locate the writing—and reading—of poetry in some other place than those mapped by analysis of ideology or of discourse. As always, the method of analysis creates its object, in these cases not an appropriate one. What poems can do is prior, that is, makes its own ground.⁶⁹

In the experimental fusion of morphemes new associations emerge that enable man to explore the foundations of his reality. For Girondo in *En la masmédula* the objective was not the description of external reality but the creation of a poetic space that would engage with other spaces, both interior and exterior, man and the world. The literary-mimetic language that functioned as the representation of reality is opposed by a poetic language not only conscious of itself and its mechanisms but which therefore questions the relationship taken for granted between language and man's reality.

The idea of grammar in the subtitle of this section is related to the experimental use of morphemes to create new words in the poems of *En la masmédula*. The reiterated presence throughout the book of these new words forms the second level of the text. This grammatical level 'corresponds'—i.e. it behaves similarly—to the aural level discussed in the

⁶⁸ McAlmon, 'Mr. Joyce Directs an Irish Word Ballet', pp. 106-107.

⁶⁹ William Rowe, *Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and the Inner Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 16.

previous section: it is also formed by repetition and accumulation of morphemes. The use of morphemes to form new words adds to the sense of simultaneity which evokes the book's spatial form: 'cada poema, cada frase de *En la masmédula* se presenta casi siempre como una galaxia verbal. Su sentido no se tiende linealmente para ser captado como a lo largo de un riel.'⁷⁰ The pattern of this level is based on fragmentation into morphemes to form new words. The formation of the basic pattern of this level takes place in two different ways. The first one is repetition; the large presence of morphemes. The second is by fusion of morphemes to form a new word or of whole words fused to form a new word word.

The presence of these words-portmanteaux in *En la masmédula* works by fusion of either morphemes or whole words. An example of the latter one would be 'egohueco' from the poem 'Recién entonces' (p. 227). It can also be formed by more conventional means such as adding a prefix to a root or word that functions as root, as in 'intradérmicos' from 'Canes más que finales' (p. 223). A word-portmanteau can also be the result of the fusion of several words as in 'olavecabracobra' ('Hasta morirla', p. 241) which is the fusion of the words 'ola', 'ave', 'cabra' and 'cobra'. The book is populated by such words-portmanteaux. These words function as vortices that pull the readers attention into them since as a product of the creative imagination they at first result unfamiliar. This compels the reader to use his imagination to interpret the text and not only his or her logical and conceptual abilities. For example, in the last case cited, three out of the four words that make that line are animals. The fourth word is 'ola' which evokes action and movement. We can think about a goat or a bird without moving, but not a wave without breaking up its nature. The wave that suggests movement is also a representation of an accumulation of fragments that come together one after the other as they are breaking up on the sand. Thus, what is suggested by that line is not only a fantastic animal but picture of dynamism and repetition: a

⁷⁰ Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central', p. 42.

type of homemade quimera in movement. And it is, in this way, a synecdoche for the whole compositional principle of the book. This is one way to interpret what Molina meant by 'galaxia verbal'. The words in the book create connections with other words in the composition at various levels. In his illuminating essay 'Mimofonías', Dardo Scavino thoroughly addressed these relationships between the linguistic elements in *En la masmédula*, he concluded that:

Cualquier palabra puede considerarse una mezcla, y como consecuencia un puente, para unir costas semánticas u homofónicas, y por eso los verdaderos protagonistas de los poemas de *En la masmédula* son menos las voces que las "subvoces", en los dos sentidos de la palabra: los mimemas de los diversos significantes, pero también los términos concomitantes que, como las armónicas de una nota, subyacen, por asociación semántica, a cada elemento seleccionado.⁷¹

In this sense, Scavino discovered that the different levels of the text weave a complex net that enables the displacement from 'un paradigma semántico o mimofónico a otro.'⁷² Scavino's essay concentrates on elucidating these relationships, their possible origin and implications. As a result he often sheds light on the intricate fabric of this text, for example: 'se notará además que en un verso como "los acordes abismos de los órganos sacros del *orgasmo*", la última palabra parece haberse formado por condensación de *órganos* y *abismos*.'⁷³ The idea of 'condensación' is important here because it implies that elements of previous words or group of words a subsequent word or group of words can surface.

⁷¹ Scavino, 'Mimofonías', pp. 542-543.

⁷² Scavino, 'Mimofonías', p. 542.

⁷³ Scavino, 'Mimofonías', pp. 537-538.

Tsur writes that in some cases in poetry 'sound becomes "an echo of the sense," or, rather, the meaning and the acoustic structure reinforce the effect of similar features in each other'.⁷⁴ This is similar to what Molina and Pellegrini argued about the language of the book. In *En la masmédula* this 'echo of sense' is, for me, evident in the repetition of morphemes that creates an aural reality that echoes the sense. A clear example of this is the poem 'Yolleo' (p. 246), which pivots around repetitions and variations of the verb 'yollar'. This is the product of the pronoun 'yo' and the ending 'llar': 'con mi yo sólo solo que yolla y yolla y yolla'. The verb 'yollar' signifies the action of self-introspection. 'Yolleo' in this sense would mean to go deep within oneself, to explore oneself constantly and repeatedly. Like the word 'tutear' which means to refer to a person informally, 'yollar' refers also to speaking of and about oneself. On the other hand, acoustically 'yollar' resembles 'llorar'. The repetition of the 'll' and 'y' sound—which are practically indistinguishable from each other—recreate not only the self-reflexive state of constant introspection—those 'espiribuceos' as Gironde called them in the poem 'El pentotal a qué'—but it also mimics the sound of crying. Crying for Gironde is vital because it is an unmediated expression of feeling and emotion. The reader finds crying with these implications in *Espantapájaros* '18' (p. 101): 'Llorar a lágrima viva. Llorar a chorros. Llorar la digestión. Llorar en sueños'. Crying becomes again the central theme of the poem 'A pleno llanto' (pp. 189-190) of *Persuasión de los días*: 'Y entre tanto lloremos/ tomados de la mano'. But in *En la masmédula* meaning and sound play off each other expanding the implications into diverse levels and directions. The recreation of the sound of crying echoes the meaning: 'junto a mis ya muertos y revivos yoes siempre siempre yollando y yoyollando siempre'. In this poem crying is not only an event of which the poem speaks but it also recreates the sound of crying forming a subtle yet provocative combination of

⁷⁴ Tsur, 'Rhyme and Cognitive Poetics', p. 59.

introspection and emotion. Both of these elements point to the book's underpinning questions about existence, about the possibilities of going beyond exteriorities. The question for a reason for existence is there in the poem: 'por qué/ si sos/ por qué di'. As the poet finds himself isolated in his existence he appeals to a transcendent power: the 'tatatodo', 'tata' meaning father, and 'todo' everything. A word-portmanteau itself form by the repetition of /t/. The question posed to this 'tatatodo' is about the poet's existence but also about the way in which he lives his life, i.e. in constant introspection: 'por qué tanto yollar'. This line points ultimately to a feeling of exhaustion from this constant questioning; a feeling that has been indicated by the poem itself, eleven lines before: 'al verme yo harto en todo'. This 'harto' contains a double meaning. On the one hand it can be read as 'I see myself being tired of everything' and, on the other, it can also be read as 'it is only me that I see in everything'. This last connotation has a resonance throughout the whole book, as Scavino writes: 'a lo largo de *En la masmédula* abundan los juegos de palabras con los pronombres de primera persona.'⁷⁵ Scavino argues that the poet has inserted his presence throughout the book in surreptitious ways, informing different words, thus, for example in 'Postnotaciones' (pp. 247-248) we find the line: 'yo cobayo de altura' about which Scavino writes:

La repetición de la sílaba /yo/ remota el primer sustantivo como si fuera una mezcla, o un grifosón, formado por los mimemas /coba/ (que imita al término *coba*, sinónimo de broma o embuste) y /yo/ (que finge ser pronombre de primera persona).⁷⁶

This constant 'yo', behind everything, is a way of forming a hidden pattern with the repetitions of his presence buried beneath different words. This would correspond to the poem 'Yolleo'. On the other hand,

⁷⁵ Scavino, 'Mimofonías', p. 532.

⁷⁶ Scavino, 'Mimofonías', p. 532, this critic finds other examples of references to the poet within different words, among others 'mínimo', 'abismi-llo' and 'yogui' from 'Tantan yo' (p. 256) or 'yo lamí' and 'ni fosa ni hoyo' from 'Porque me cree su perro' (p. 257).

this constant finding oneself in everything compels the poet towards its opposite; that is, of emptying the ego of presence. The existential tiredness expressed by the poet—'al verme yo hartó en todo'—is reflected in the repetition of words related to his existence at different moments of the book.⁷⁷ The theme of tiredness is addressed in the poem that closes *En la masmédula* 'Cansancio' (pp. 263-264) and which, like crying, had a precedent in *Persuasión de los días* in a poem with the same title (pp. 162-163).

The poet's personal experience of the world which is translated as Scavino suggested in the constant presence of himself in the poems is found in the poem 'Mi lumía' (p. 235), this time in the repetition of the possessive 'mi'. In this poem the reader also finds the repetition of the morpheme 'lu':

Mi *lu*
mi *lubidulia*
mi *golocidalove*
mi *lu* tan *luz* tan tu que me en*lucielabisma*
y *descentrate/lura*
y *venusafrodea*
y me *nirvana* el suyo la *crucis* los *desalmes*
con sus *melimeleos*
sus *eropsiquisedas* sus *decúbitos* *lianas* y *dermiferios* *limbos* y *gormullos*
mi *lu*
mi *luar*
mi *mito*
demonoave *dea* *rosa*
mi *pez* *hada*
mi *luvisita* *nimia*
mi *lubísnea*

⁷⁷ Scavino, 'Mimofonías', p. 532.

mi /u más lar
más lampo
mi pulpa /u de vértigo de galaxias de semen de misterio
mi /ubella /usola
mi total /u plevida
mi toda /u
/umía

The presence of the morphemes 'mi' and 'lu' throughout the poem are repetitions of the first line of the poem. It is not difficult to imagine that 'mi lu' is a fragmentation of the figure 'mi luz' or 'mi luna'. The significant fact is that there are seventeen repetitions of the morpheme 'lu'. This creates patterns on different levels: with sound, with graphemes, and with the image. Like in 'yolleo', after the introduction of the subject 'mi lu', the repetitions of the morpheme 'lu' can be taken to refer to a constant presentation of the subject referred to as 'mi lu'. This shows the isomorphic relationship between the different levels of these poems: they are formed by the repetition of the phonemes, morphemes, and images.

The repetition of the sound 'u' throughout this poem can be linked to a theme of the third nocturne of *Persuasión de los días* where the poet writes about his reaction to the presence of the moon: 'la miro./ Quiero ulular./ No puedo' (p. 148). A similar theme is present in the sixth nocturne (p. 151) where the poet directs his poem to an owl, the animal that 'ulula'. Here Gironde writes: '¡Ah! Lechuza. Lechuza./ ¡Si tuviese tu quena!'. A quena is a small flute from the Andes. Gironde wants to express himself naturally like the owl. Naturalness, in the sense of being something unmediated, is the reason behind the importance of crying. To want to express oneself like an owl means the desire to step aside from reason and culture to be free from conditioning circumstances. This can also be found in the poetry of Jorge Eduardo Eielson, who sees in the

animal nature of man a mode to transcend the limitations of a fabricated culture. As in the echo between crying and 'yollar', in the poem 'Mi lumía' Girondo managed to recreate the sound made by an owl. The setting of the third nocturne of *Persuasión* is the night and the moonlight breaking through the clouds: 'a través de la veta, mineral, de una nube,/ aparece la luna' (p. 148). 'Mi lumía' has also references to the night in the word 'galaxias' that suggests the darkness of the night sky and outer space. 'Galaxias' is part of a sexual image, it refers to the: 'galaxias de semen de misterio'. With this in mind the 'u' of 'lu' takes a playful erotic overtone as it mimics the sounds of the lovers during lovemaking. Consistent with the erotic content of the poem the reader finds the words 'golocidalove', a possible compound of 'golosina' and 'gozar' and 'love'; 'venusafrodea', a verb created with the Latin and Greek names for the goddess of love; and expressions like 'me nirvana', which refers to the state reached in the sexual climax. It is by the repetition of the root 'lu' that Girondo forms the meaning of the poem partly based on the interconnections within the poem and to other poems such as the nocturnes. The repetitions of 'lu' recreate the sound of the owl and its relationship with the night and moon and it also recreates the lovers' passionate sounds. In both examples, 'Yolleo' and 'Mi lumía', the formation of patterns based on repetition and accumulation of morphemes creates an effect directly contributing to the sense of the poem and to the formation of the spatial form of the book.

If we unpack one of the words-portmanteau of the poem 'Mi lumía', for example the word 'enlucielabisma', we would see the complexity of this use of language. This word-portmanteau is made up of the prefix 'en' that denotes place but which could also be used to create a verb. Then 'luciel', which can have different meanings, the most obvious is 'luz-cielo' or 'luz del cielo'. This repeats again the main image of the poem 'mi lu' in either of its two possible acceptations: 'luz' or 'luna'. Both of them help see through darkness. It also has reminiscences of 'luzbel',

the prince of the rebellious angels, the beautiful light. This last meaning is not isolated. It is later contextualised with 'demonoave', which is a fusion of demon and bird. Girondo uses the image of a succubus—a winged female demon that has intercourse with its victims while they sleep—in 'Ella' (pp. 261-262) and 'El uno nones' (p. 228): 'the succubae, come and have intercourse with him [Adam], and with Adam's seed they give birth to demons. The succubus lying on top of the man in his sleep and stealing his semen away is, of course, another image of Lillith, the female being who refuses to stay in her "proper place"'.⁷⁸ Lucifer and Lillith are both symbols of rebelliousness, something Girondo could identify with. The last segment of 'enlucielabisma' has different but simultaneous meanings. It is an abyss, a recurrent image throughout the book, it can signify the scale of the poet's emotions, or the scale of the repercussions that he sees in events; it could also mean to be in awe of something. *En la masmédula* displays a wide range of examples revolving around a gothic aesthetic in the link between sex/woman and death and the grave. It can also be a metaphor for forgetting oneself, or being lost: in the abyss with the demons, away from God. The word-portmanteau 'enlucielabisma' then could be read as a state of being.

There are other types of word repetition in *En la masmédula*. For example, in the poem 'El pentotal a qué' (pp. 229-230) the interrogative pronoun 'qué' is repeated seventeen times. This repetition covers three areas of the text: the visual aspect with the graphic, the acoustic, and the semantic. One of the repetitions itself suggests multiple repetitions of the question: 'el pluriaqué' (p. 230). But in this poem, more than the sense, it emphasises a lack of sense. The search for meaning is a question left open. It does not seem to be addressed to anyone in particular, except the poet himself in which case it would be another example of the constant self introspection explored in 'yolleo'. 'El pentotal a qué' contains a direct reference to Hamlet's soliloquy: 'el "to be" a qué/

⁷⁸ William Irving Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light Mythology, Sexuality, and the Origins of Culture* (London: Rider/Hutchinson, 1981), p. 19.

el "not to be" a qué', where the emphasis does not rest on the possibilities of giving an answer to either of the options but asks about the point of asking the question in the first place; the nullity of both options.⁷⁹ The poem never closes but after repeating three times 'a qué' it moves on to 'y sin embargo'. This expression is used to signify an alternative that is not given in the poem; although the alternative could be the silence to which the poem is left open; the option beyond language. The three final repetitions of 'a qué' move gradually away from the left margin suggesting a slower reading and emphasising the dramatic effect of the 'y sin embargo'.

A similar repetition is found in the poem 'Tropos' (p. 239). The poem is formed by nine repetitions of the morpheme 'toc' and seventeen repetitions of the question 'qué': 'toco y mastoco' and 'qué tú/ qué qué/ qué quena'. Both words pay off each other. On the one hand the action of touching and the question for the meaning both of the object being touched and the action of touching itself. This is a play of surfaces that goes to the core of Girondo's existential quest. On the one hand there is the skin that touches and on the other the exteriority of the object being touched. It cannot go further than that. And this impossibility is what Girondo is trying to understand.

There is a category of repetitions that on which I would like to concentrate on at this point. This particular category is not present in one poem or in a fragment of a poem but it is found scattered throughout the book. It is formed by prefixes like *ex*, *sub*, *intra*, and a root. It is the constant presence of these prefixes that forms a pattern. By it self, for example, the word 'subpiso' from the poem 'Canes más que finales' (p. 223) would be a suggestive and interesting image. However within the context of the pattern formed by these prefixes it becomes related to a whole subcategory of Girondo's poetic language that refers visually to strata and thus depth versus surface, it relates to spaces within spaces;

⁷⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, ed. by Harold Jenkins, Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 277, III. 1. 56.

and semantically to lack or subtraction. Within the context of the repetitions the meaning of these prefixes opens up to different possibilities. These are some of the examples that the reader can find throughout the book: 'exellas', 'exquisiticas', 'exotro', 'extradermicos', 'exnúbiles', 'suburbanas', 'subripio', 'subpisos', 'subvoces', 'subánima', 'sublatir', 'subsueño', 'subvivencias', 'subyollitos', 'subcero', 'subyo', 'intradermicos', 'inorbito', 'inhímenes', 'intrafondo', 'interllaga', 'inóseo', 'inóvulo', 'desinhalar', 'prefugas'. This repetition calls the reader's attention to the meaning not only of the individual words, a line or a poem but to the overarching structural pattern of the book. Unlike the repetitions previously discussed this pattern of repetitions is not based on the accumulation of the same word or word-fragment but on the multiple presences of structurally similar words. The repetition of these prefixes creates a series of images that suggest a fold within language, i.e. of words unfolding out of other words. This fold is an image of volume, and thus of space. For example, there are sixteen repetitions of the prefix *sub* in *En la mas médula*. These repetitions expand the meaning of this prefix because it not only transforms the meaning of the root to which it modifies but it also connects with every other one of the repetitions suggesting unknown levels of the text or of existence. Enrique Molina gives the following interpretation of the presence of these prefixes:

La miseria de una existencia rebajada donde las cosas adolecen perpetuamente de una falta de totalidad, se debaten entre los *sub* y los *ex* (no alcanzan su plenitud o la han perdido) para presentarse sólo como carencia o fuga.⁸⁰

Next to the loss of plenitude emphasised by Molina, I think that there is a possible spatial reading to these prefixes. This spatiality would contribute to the sense of simultaneity in the structure of modern poetry

⁸⁰ Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central', p. 45.



that was theorised by Joseph Frank. The pattern formed by these word-compounds creates a sense of having to hold them up all at the same time in order to understand the meaning of the work. Resembling concrete poetry's communicative principles which states that the poem communicates its structure, in Gironde's book part of its meaning is the structure itself; that is, the meaning of the work is not to be found only outside of the work, in the objects of which it speaks. The complexity of this book lies in that it both signals to the exterior situation of man and to the poet's internal landscape, as well as to the structural reality of language. This is why for Molina 'introducirse en esta poesía es penetrar a la profundidad del ser, hasta sus últimos límites.' If by 'ser' we read the being of things that exist then I agree with him that there is a sense of penetration, of introduction into the mass of existence; however as much as to man's or the poet's existence, the 'almamasa', as to the existence of language as well.⁸¹ This feeling of excavation is a crucial movement in the language of *En la masmédula*.⁸² Gironde seeks those depths of existence because the world to him is a fable, a façade. I believe that Gironde is here thinking of Nietzsche, who in his *Twilight of the idols* entitled a chapter, precisely, 'How the "real world" finally became a fable'.⁸³ Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo writes the following about this section from Nietzsche's book:

No se trata empero del "presunto" mundo verdadero sino que se trata del mundo verdadero *tout court*. Y si bien Nietzsche agrega que de esa manera la fábula ya no es tal porque no hay ninguna verdad que la revele como apariencia e ilusión, la noción de fábula no pierde del todo su sentido. En efecto, la fábula impide atribuir a

⁸¹ Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central', p. 45

⁸² This earthbound movement in Gironde was not only metaphorical but also literal. Gironde took part in an archaeological dig that has been dated between 1938 and 1949, according to Raúl Antelo. Gironde kept a journal of this, which he entitled *Expedición a Quilmes II*, see Raúl Antelo, 'Estudio filológico preliminar', in *OC*, pp. vxii-xc (pp. lxxi-lxxx).

⁸³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans., intro., and notes by Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 20.

las apariencias que la componen la fuerza contundente que correspondía al *ontos on* en metafísica.⁸⁴

The question that Gironde is asking himself revolves around the nature of the world that seems to be made of exteriorities. This is why he has multiple images that speak of the core, i. e., a search for what is real, questioning reality along his way. Following this idea of the world as fable, it is in the subversion of the accepted poetic rules where Gironde saw the opportunity to present the reality of his experiences since the regular order of language, socially convened and imposed, did not present a suitable model for the way in which he experienced the world.⁸⁵ Gironde through his poetic experiments seeks to suggest a space of the book that would counter the superficiality of the world.

As I argued at the beginning of the present section, in *En la masmédula* the fragmentation of language becomes essential to the experimental transgressions of modern writers and those of the historical Avant-Garde movements. The signs to the opening of the possibilities of the linguistic field are palpable from Marinetti's *Parole in libertà*, through Tristan Tzara's recipe for writing a dadaist poem, Breton's attack on logic, all the way to the neo-avant-garde movements of the fifties and sixties such as *lettrisme* or concrete poetry.⁸⁶ By challenging the accepted linguistic order these experiments also attacked the basis of ordering thought, and therefore a particular way to establish a relationship between the individual and reality structured around the established orders of language and logic as the main vessels for the communication

⁸⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *Fin de la modernidad: nihilismo y hermenéutica en la cultura posmoderna*, trans. by Alberto L. Bixio (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2000), p. 28.

⁸⁵ Gianni Vattimo, *Ética de la interpretación*, trans. by Teresa Oñate (Barcelona: Paidós, 1991), p. 123.

⁸⁶ Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax-Imagination without Strings-Words-in-Freedom', pp. 95-106; Tristan Tzara, 'Dada manifesto 1918', in *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. by Barbara Wright, Illustrations by Francis Picabia (London: John Calder, 1977; repr. 1981), pp. 3-13; André Breton, 'Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme', in *Les Manifestes du Surréalisme* ([Paris]: Le Sagittaire, 1955), pp. 5-42 (pp. 12-13); Isidore Isou, 'Les créations du lettrisme', *Lettrisme*, 4th series, 1 (January 1972).

of thought and experience.⁸⁷ But not only for communication, but for, to a certain extent, the very possibility of having those experiences; as American filmmaker Stan Brakhage wrote at the opening of his book *Metaphors on Vision*:

How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of "Green"? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can that eye be? Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations of color.⁸⁸

This same challenging spirit that runs through Brakhage's words is present in Gironde. The reader can perceive this, for example, in the importance the poet gives to crying as an adulterated expression of emotion. In the last poem from *Persuasión de los días*, 'Gratitud' (pp. 202-204), Gironde presents another side of this conscientious relationship with reality. This poem is made of a list of different and seemingly random objects and situations for which and to which the poet expresses his gratitude:

Gracias aroma

azul,

fogata

encelo.

[...]

Gracias a lo que nace,

a lo que muere

⁸⁷ [Lazlo] Moholy-Nagy, 'Literature', in *The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature*, pp. 78-141 (p.106).

⁸⁸ Quoted in R. Bruce Elder, *The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Charles Olson* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), p. 131.

[...]

Gracias huevo.

Gracias fango,

Sonido.

Gracias piedra.

Muchas gracias por todo.

Muchas gracias.

Oliverio Gironde,

agradecido.

It is the poet's intention to express his gratitude to *individual* objects and events. For the 'untutored eye' it is necessary to relate to every object in a particular way since there is no consideration of categories based on which and through which the 'tutored eye' is able to establish a relationship with reality. This takes particular strength in the language of *En la masmédula*. With *En la masmédula* Gironde attempted nothing less than a revolution of his own relationship with reality and existence; and with the language used to communicate, express, and, to a certain point, construct them. So it was on the order of linguistic signs that Gironde centred his challenge. The consensual literary ordering of thoughts and emotions in language was not only unsatisfactory from an artistic point of view but it was insufficient and not malleable enough for what the poet needed to do.

Pound wrote that the poetic image gives the reader an instantaneous 'sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits.'⁸⁹ The images in *En la masmédula* are indeed a source of liberation for an array of different visual associations. The visual content of some of the word-portmanteaux suggests more than one possible image. For example, when the reader faces 'un poco

⁸⁹ Pound, 'A Retrospect', in *Literary Essays*, pp. 3-14 (p.4).

nubecosa' ('Islas sólo de sangre', p. 225) there is an immediate and sudden complex of images suggested. That is, '*nubecosa*' evokes the almost immateriality of an object and the almost materiality of intellectual or emotional events. The image is not the equation 'cloud' plus 'thing'; rather, it is an amalgam that presents something new to the reader. The fusion of these words is what Décio Pignatari called word-metaphors: '*um pequeno ideograma verbivocovisual*'.⁹⁰ The verbivocovisual refers to something similar to the streams of language that have been previously addressed; '*verbi*' refers to the semantic aspect of language, '*voco*' to the sound and '*visual*' to the image. However, as will be discussed further on for the concrete poets the visual aspect also meant the image of the poem on the page. Not so for Gironde, who does not use typography or the page as the space proper of the poem, except in isolated cases such as the poem '*Plexilio*' (p. 249). For Dietrich Scheunemann montage is one of the most characteristic techniques of Avant-Garde art.⁹¹ This technique underlines the connection, however arbitrary, between things, objects, concepts, feelings and ideas that are sharing a common space which they themselves have created since in the 'normal' space of language these connections would not have taken place. This technique charges the objects and the space itself with a different meaning, since it is the distance between things that these techniques bring to the forefront of the imagination; for it is the imagination that binds them together in the space of the work. And so it is with language, these word-metaphors, montage-words, or words-portmanteaux bypass logic to create new terms, for example, '*maramor*' in '*Balaúa*' (p. 252). Here we have the

⁹⁰ Décio Pignatari, 'Poesia concreta: pequena marcação histórico-formal', in *Teoria da poesia concreta: Textos críticos e manifestos 1950-1960* (São Paulo: Livraria duas cidades, 1975), pp. 62-66 (p. 62).

⁹¹ Dietrich Scheunemann, 'On Photography and Painting: Prolegomena to a New Theory of the Avant-Garde', in *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, ed. by Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 15-48; Saúl Yurkievich would agree in some respects with this assessment about the importance of the collage and montage techniques in Avant-Garde art, see in particular '*Estética de lo discontinuo y lo fragmentario: el collage*', in *Del arte verbal* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2002), pp. 79-94.

combination of two words —one concrete, 'mar' and one abstract 'amor'—fused to form a new term. The simile between love and the sea is normal, even commonplace; however, 'maramor' is not the same. The lack of a conjunctive particle makes the meaning immediate. The elements are not kept apart by words such as 'like', 'is' or 'as'. Both elements are fused into one. Another example can be 'sofocatedio', a fusion of 'sofoca' and 'tedio'. These examples could have been rendered as tediousness is suffocating or suffocating tediousness and love is like an ocean, but what is at stake here is not only a semantic message. To say 'maramor' is not only more vivid—it is immediate because it bypasses logical syntaxis—and demonstrates a particular understanding of the language used, it suggests a different psychic and experiential order, as well as granting to those new terms a certain 'aura' and thus a place within a space that, if not the order of things in the world, is a different existence outside the order of communicative and logical language.

On this "grammatical" level of the text I have concentrated my analysis in the way Gironde formed words. He did this in different ways, by using morphemes and other elements of speech; by fusing two or more words together; by adding a suffix to a root to create a whole category of words within his book. I have tried to interpret some of these words-portmanteaux but my main objective has been to demonstrate that the repetition of these words-portmanteaux form the patterns of this particular level of the text. This is the second level which added to the other two will form the overall structural pattern of the book which will suggest the spatial form.

PATTERNS OF SPACES

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the existence of the third level in Gironde's *En la masmedula*. As with the two previous cases, what I am looking for is the repetition and accumulation of particular elements of the text; at this point, I will concentrate my search in a particular kind

of images: those which depict or suggest spaces. The constant presence of spatial images creates a pattern, and this is added to the previous two levels to suggest the structural pattern of the composition. The overabundance of spatial imagery in this book is not fortuitous. The repetition of spatial images fulfils a double role in my argument. On the one hand, it creates the third level. On the other, they imply a 'rhizomatic' connection between all the images along the book. The multiple spaces would connect in the mind of the reader. The virtual space of this book is implied throughout its different levels. Sound is a physical being that occupies space, even though, as José Luis Pardo writes recalling Hume, a sequence of musical notes provides the listener with a sense of time.⁹² If for Hume consecutive notes gives us the notion of time, Pardo concludes, 'tres puntos dispuestos en una hoja de papel (o, si se prefiere, tres objetos sobre una mesa) nos dan la idea de espacio.'⁹³ The simultaneity of existent objects is the basis for this notion of space.⁹⁴ Thus, if the different elements in the composition of *En la mas médula* have to be held-on to in order to 'see' them simultaneously, it is plausible that these elements suggest a spatial order to the reader.

In the narrative *Interlunio* we read this revealing confession: 'yo no soy, ni he sido nunca más que un corcho. Durante toda la vida he flotado, de aquí para allá, sin conocer otra cosa que la superficie.' (p. 123).⁹⁵ I believe that this phrase is a key, in the musical sense of the dominant chord of a composition, where the dichotomy surface/depth is what can provide sense to Gironde's work. The problem of surfaces in Gironde's thought was identified, although in passing, by Saúl Yurkievich in his renowned work on twentieth century Latin American poetry. In the chapter dedicated to the poetry of Oliverio Gironde, Yurkievich writes that the poet's first two books were 'libros de aprendizaje, tributarios de la perceptiva ultraísta—ritmos de urbe moderna, furor neologista, gemas

⁹² José Luis Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad* (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 1992), p. 27.

⁹³ Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad*, p. 27.

⁹⁴ Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ My emphasis.

metafóricas—que Gironde aplica en superficie.⁹⁶ With this Yurkievich does not mean to address the presence of surfaces in the poetry of Gironde, but rather that Gironde only passes-by these aesthetics. Yurkievich does not dig any deeper regarding surfaces as a possible theme in the poetry of Gironde. However, his use of the term 'superficie' is telling because even if Yurkievich's intention is to underline the lack of commitment to Ultraist aesthetics on Gironde's part, it also recalls the very nature of these books. Both *Veinte poemas* and *Calcomanías* are books whose poems rely heavily on the use of visual description, images, and metaphors as their essential elements. 'Los poemas', writes Delfina Muschietti about *Veinte poemas* and *Calcomanías*, 'juegan con la traducción de otra serie cultural (artes plásticas) para fingirse "croquis" o "tarjeta postal".⁹⁷ Both books engage mainly with the surface of things; that is, with their exterior image. Other critics have circled around the notions of surface and depth in the poetry of Gironde; for example, Enrique Molina, who writes in his prologue to Gironde's complete poetry that its trajectory moves: 'desde la escritura lineal y lúcida del comienzo hasta los mecanismos más remotos del lenguaje, en la *profundidad* de su origen.'⁹⁸ This is Molina's description of the general movement in the poet's work: from the external metaphorical descriptions to the inner working of the poet's existence in *En la masmédula*. I believe that in his awareness of these factors (exteriority/interiority) Gironde is seeking to establish a more intimate relationship with the things of this world, with animals, people, objects, emotions, events, etc: 'Gironde busca las esencias para convivir en plenitud con la vida'.⁹⁹ The 'profundidad' and the 'esencias' to which Molina and Rizzo-Vast are making reference stand

⁹⁶ Yurkievich, 'La pupila del cero', in *Fundadores*, pp. 203-228 (p.204). The books that Yurkievich is referring to are *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía* and *Calcomanías* pp. 3-27 and 29-59 of OC respectively.

⁹⁷ Delfina Muschietti, 'La fractura ideológica en los primeros textos de Oliverio Gironde', in Carlos García and Dieter Reichardt, *Las vanguardias literarias en Argentina, Uruguay y Paraguay: bibliografía y antología crítica* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2004), pp. 373-385 (p. 374).

⁹⁸ Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central', pp. 10-11. My emphasis.

⁹⁹ Patricio Rizzo-Vast, *El lugar de Gironde* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2001), p. 81.

in clear contrast with the notion of surface. Gironde felt that he was not able to know the nature of things, of others and of himself. This attitude creates in Gironde what Adriana Rodríguez calls 'una escritura desaforada que encuentra su razón de ser en la búsqueda de la solidaridad universal'.¹⁰⁰ Gironde's purposeful engagement with individuals is the reason for this solidarity as the poem 'Gratitud' (pp. 202-204) shows. What Gironde is trying to establish is a personal approximation to individuals, an attitude that sets him close to Walt Whitman and the North American tradition of engagement on a personal basis and a universal connection between all things:

O take my hand Walt Whitman!
Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds!
Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next,
Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.¹⁰¹

But unlike his first books of poetry where description is the principal device, in *En la masmedula* Gironde tries to penetrate the surface, to rupture the external membrane and to go beyond images and façades into the uncharted territory of existence. This is why compared to *Veinte poemas* or *Calcomanias* the images of *En la masmedula* seem confusing and unclear. *En la masmedula* creates an oneiric landscape because it is set in contrast to the daylight clarity of description. Gironde seems to acknowledge that the nature of language is external and temporal, that its inability to portray depth and space was a primary challenge for him. I think that the isomorphic structure of the book acts as a device to the limitations of language. Gironde's linguistic experiments are not topsy-turvy attempts to create something 'new' and

¹⁰⁰ Adriana Rodríguez Pérsico, 'Gironde o el triunfo de una ética posagónica', in *OC*, pp. 379-403 (p. 379); see also Tamara Kamenszain, 'Musas de vanguardia', in *OC*, pp. 544-551.

¹⁰¹ Walt Whitman, 'Salut au monde!', in *Leaves of Grass*, ed., intro., and notes by Jerome Loving (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 112-120 (p. 112); Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Self-Reliance', in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. with notes by Joel Porte (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), pp. 257-282.

controversial for its own sake but have reason, purpose, and method. Girondo's purpose is to explore the depth of existence, almost to recreate it by writing a book that could evoke some sort of internal spatiality.

This search for depth and space is manifested in the numerous images in *En la masmédula* of holes and excavations, of craters and caverns, of spaces such as rooms and tombs, of apertures from the pores of the skin to doors and windows as I will presently show. As with the previous levels, the images that form this pattern are found disseminated throughout the composition and it is when we look at it simultaneously that we realise that those repetitions hold an important part of the book's meaning. I have formed a mental picture of this proliferation of spaces that resembles a rhizome-type 'order'. By this I mean, a series of roots, fibres and nodes horizontally extended underground in which any node can be connected to any other without any particular one having pre-eminence: 'le rhizome est un système acentré, non hiérarchique'.¹⁰² In the book there is no consecutive order in these images, it does not work like Chinese boxes, the smaller leading necessarily to a larger one leading to a larger whole. In *En la masmédula* a small space that leads nowhere and of which there is only one example is as significant as a type of space of which there are multiple cases or that create clearer connections with an overall meaning. What is of consequence in all cases is the presence of a particular image and its connections with other images of spaces.

In the particular context of this chapter space is understood as that which is framed by boundaries or markers. These can be physical: walls, signs, people, objects of any size, sound, light, etc.; or metaphysical: ideas, imagery, emotions, etc. The framing of space permits the visualisation of an inside and an outside, and the interaction that may develop from the division—particularly of the line, the boundary itself, between adjacent areas. Space is not necessarily seen as empty air

¹⁰² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome: Introduction* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1976), p. 62.

waiting to be occupied, but rather as what is held together by the interconnections among the things that are in it but that are also part of it. Space is not the empty air between things because it is also a thing in relation with other objects and subjects in it. In this sense it is a negative object in relation to the presence of other objects, and can be modified by movements and alterations. Space is a question of relations:

La tarea de describir de este modo el espacio requiere efectivamente dar vida a las cosas *qua* cosas, *qua* decorado de la existencia cotidiana o extraordinaria que, si bien constituye la forma de tal o cual "manera de ser", lo hace de un modo en que no es posible del todo separar la forma del contenido: no podemos extraer la existencia "fuera" del espacio, y acaso tampoco podamos extraer cada existencia singular "fuera" de su espacio.¹⁰³

Objects within a space both form it and are formed by it. The existence of an object is modified, however slightly, by its localisation in space and by the relationships it establishes with the different entities that occupy it. As Joseph Frank sets forth, in modern poetry meaning is established in the relationships between different elements of the composition which are not revealed in a linear fashion but at the point when the reader's mind can grasp them in concert. In this theory of modern poetry elements would affect each other's significance, as in this fragment by American poet Robert Creeley:

—it

it—¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Creeley, 'Gemini', in *The Finger: Poems 1966-1969* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970), pp. 54-56 (p. 56).

Although both words are the same, they are separated by an interval of time and space. The first 'it' is not the same as the second one. The second one is not just a repetition of the first, but it is however affected by it. Without the second 'it' there would be no resonance and there would be no reason that a particular thing could not be abstracted into a category or class. Repetition conditions the reader's memory with a residue whether this is of sound, image, or concept. This is the basis for Ezra Pound's theory of harmony, where any chord can be set in the context of any other as long as the correct interval of time is set between them.¹⁰⁵ In terms of reading we cannot speak of harmony in the musical sense but we can, however, take into consideration the residual memory of sounds within a poem as I discussed during the first subsection of this chapter.

In *En la masmédula* there is a reiterative presence of metaphors and images of space. There are spaces of many kinds and sizes; these are organic as well as inorganic. I am considering as spaces from a cavity in a tooth to a room in a house. These spaces appear throughout the book. For instance, there are cases where the images suggest things that are in themselves formed of multiple small spaces, for example, 'bipanales senos' ('Balaúa', p. 252). In the poem, this image is followed by a reference to honey, so it could be argued that Girondo was looking at the honeycomb as the storage-space of honey. But he does not use the word 'colmena', which would have had a different effect. The erotic image is as important as the poet's choice of words to present his lover's breasts.¹⁰⁶ He specifically uses 'panales' suggesting the multi-cell structure of the honeycomb. The honeycomb's structure has two crucial elements for Girondo's use of images in the book. First, the simultaneous presence of multiple cells; and second, they can function as a connection between two separate sides. But these playful images, where intimate

¹⁰⁵ Pound, 'Treatise on Harmony', in *Selected Prose*, pp. 75-86 (p. 79).

¹⁰⁶ Girondo is fond of the combination of the erotic and the sweet; see, for example, 'golocidalove' of 'Mi lumia'. The first part of the word seems to have been extracted from 'golocina', i.e. candy. Or in the same 'Balaúa' the word 'eromiel'.

and sweet elements are combined, are not dominant in *En la masmédula*. In fact, the poems in this book have three dominant areas of 'thematic' movement, and only one of these is expressed under a rather positive light. The three areas are: the inner world of the poet, the outside and his lover. In the first category we have the poems, 'Al gravitar rotando', 'Aridandantemente', 'Islas sólo de sangre', 'Hay que buscarlo', 'Recién entonces', 'El uno nones', 'El pentotal a qué', 'Rada anímica', 'Gristenia', 'Solplosorbos', 'Yolleo', 'Destino', 'Habría', 'Tantan yo', 'Porque me cree su perro', and 'Menos'; in the second one we can put, 'La mezcla', 'Noche tótem', 'Canes más que finales', 'El puro no', 'Por vocación de dado', 'Maspleonasmo', 'Alta noche', 'Trazumos', 'Tropos', 'Hasta morirla', 'Las puertas', 'Posnotaciones', 'Plexilio', 'Ante el sabor inmóvil', 'A mí', 'Mito', and 'Cansancio'; in the third one, 'Mi lumía', 'Balaúa', 'Topatumba', and 'Ella'. It is this last one that seems to be less dark than the previous ones. Of course, this division cannot be taken literally, nor are the poems thematically divided in such a crude manner, especially because the composition formed by all the poems *is the area* that unites all the different spaces.

Most of the images of multiple spaces are set underground, in the dampness of empty, half-lit catacombs: 'insepulto intacto bajo sus multiciptas con trasfondos de arcadas' ('El uno nones', p. 228). If we look at the structure of this image and the one in 'bipanales senos', we will see that they have certain similarities. Both are formed by clusters of holes. Next to the hexagonal cells of a honeycomb we find the empty niches of a columbarium. There is another structurally analogous image on a larger scale in the poem 'Cansancio' (p. 264): '*necrópolis de reputrefactas palabras*'.¹⁰⁷ As the city of the dead the basic structure of a necropolis is a configuration of tombs, which are basically holes in the ground. These openings in the ground connect the outside world with the earth and represent the possibilities of accessing unknown depths. This

¹⁰⁷ My emphasis.

image of the necropolis can also be seen as a rhizome. There are access points to the outside which lead to inner chambers, but there can also be other smaller chambers as well as passages that lead nowhere and that end abruptly; and there can also be undiscovered chambers or secret ones all connected by known or unknown passageways.¹⁰⁸

In *En la masmédula* there is a proliferation of this type of images, but there are other references to underground, hidden systems of holes, passages or tunnels. The references can be as narrow as the small holes of a mole's borrow, for example the 'toques topos' ('Recién entonces', p. 227) and 'esqueleto topo' ('Por vocación de dado', pp. 233-234). In these two cases there is no direct reference to the underground spaces, but if we take a closer look at 'esqueleto topo' we will see that a similar image is still evoked. The bone structure is being compared to the systems of underground tunnels made by a mole. But the skeleton is the mole insofar as it is not just a space but a presence hidden under the skin and flesh just as the mole is hidden under the earth. The bones that make the skeletal structure are in themselves porous and in their centre lies the marrow. The marrow is not only the centre but it is also hidden. Therefore the reference to the mole goes, indeed, much deeper than the 'to-to' alliteration of 'toques topos' and 'esqueleto topo'. The second image is particularly striking since it gives a parallel between the body and the earth—the skeleton would be buried in the flesh just like a mole moves and creates its burrow underground—but it also reaffirms the idea of a displaced centre of the body. By centre we must understand in this context a metaphorical, but also physical, core: where Girondo wants to reach, the essence of a thing: the marrow.

The openings into the earth are not meant to be simply macabre. There is a violent element present in varying degrees throughout Girondo's work but that seems to increase from *Interlunio*. However, the

¹⁰⁸ This description of the necropolis is intentionally paraphrasing the description that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari make of the hotel in Kafka's *Hotel Amerika*, in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Poland, foreword by Réda Bensmaïa, Theory and History of Literature, 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 3.

macabre in Gironde is accompanied by a sense of hope and re-birth: 'alguna cripta madre que incube la esperanza' ('Soplosorbos', pp. 243-244). As with the organic cycle in the poetry of Eielson where the eschatological aspects are indissoluble links in the chain of birth, life and death, the macabre in Gironde is set within a context from which it could also signal a possible rebirth. Death and birth, sex and death, are closely interrelated: 'más sacra carne carmen de hipermelosas púberes vibrátiles de sexotumba' ('Maspleonismo', p. 236); and in 'Topatumba' (p. 254), we read 'mi tumba' in reference to the lover: 'ízala tú mi tumba'. The word 'tumba' in this poem can be read both as movement and as tomb. In the second connotation we find that her body becomes his last resting place, where he will find peace. We also found the erotic connection between orgasm and death, and once again the parallel between the body and the earth. The interpenetration of the bodies during lovemaking is similar to the idea of the body being deposited into the earth, and whether this image is a tomb or a cave they signify a crossing over a threshold, to step over the threshold into the oracle where the secret lies. The images of the columbarium and the necropolis are both openings onto the depths of the earth: 'la importancia de lo larval, restablecimiento de un íntimo vínculo con la madre tierra y las fuerzas genéticas [...] La tierra es principio de absorción. Tumba. Vientre.'¹⁰⁹ To be absorbed back into the earth is to become part of it once more, to dissolve the isolated existence into the welcoming soil. The openings are passageways into the dark unknown, they are a way of communicating the open access into the earth. In *En la masmédula* these openings, this clustered spaces, point to a 'trasfondo', something that is beyond our reach. This is not necessarily something specific, but rather a universal 'inside', what lies beyond the surface as in the line from 'Hay que buscarlo' (p. 226): 'hay que buscarlo dentro'. This interiority is what explicitly or implicitly is sought in this book.

¹⁰⁹ Régis Bonvicino, 'Bajtín, el cuerpo, Creely y Gironde', in *OC*, pp. 568-572 (p. 571).

But not all images of openings in *En la masmédula* are directly associated with the earth. The abyss, although it could also belong to the category of images linked to the earth, in its acceptance of an immeasurably deep chasm or void, metaphorically refers to the interior emptiness of man and his inevitable separation from other beings and things. This points to two things: first, the emptiness of man's inner life, the: 'egohueco herniado' of 'Recien entonces' (p. 227), the 'llagánima' ('Maspleonasmó', p. 236), but particularly 'animabisman' ('Hasta morirla', p. 241); man's interiority as an abyss or open sore. Gironde puts himself in as the space of this search in the pun: 'el giro hondo' (Hasta morirla, p. 242). However, these openings could be considered the soul's openings for communication with and perception of the outside world. And secondly, man's impossibility to live in communion with life, the isolation and separation explored by Camus in his *Myth of Sisyphus*. The distance between individuals becomes an insurmountable abyss: 'the other represents the relation to infinity because he is unreachable.'¹¹⁰ The distance between two people does not have to be visually quantifiable. Two people may be in close physical proximity, however it is only their skins that would come in contact with each other, hence the importance of lovemaking for Gironde as the expression of going beyond the other's exteriority. There is always an minimum but unavoidable distance between two people. This insignificant distance, the one that remains even in touching, is explored in the poem 'Tropos' (p. 239):

Toco

[...]

toco y mastoco

y nada

Prefiguras de ausencia

¹¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. and intro by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 72.

[...]

qué hondonadas

qué soledades huecas

[...]

qué fondos

[...]

qué llaves

[...]

qué fallebas heladas que no abren

qué nada toco

en todo

The possibility of touch is not in question in this poem. It is rather the meaning in the act of touching at the end of which there is nothing: 'qué nada toco/ en todo'. He repeats, 'solos solos', man's isolation is inevitable. The poem is divided in two sections. The second one opens with the 'Prefiguras de ausencia'. Because language could be understood as an act of substitution, language is the anticipation of absence particularly in the modality of the trope. A trope is where language functions indirectly or surreptitiously. This second acceptance is validated when the similarities between 'tropo' and 'topo' are taken into account. This animal is the symbol of existence underground, away from sight and surface. Every line of the second part of the poem begins with the question 'qué'. Here the poet seems to be referring not to the objects designated by the words in the poem, but he rather seems to be questioning the words themselves:

qué máscaras

qué soledades huecas

qué sí qué no

qué sino que me destempla el toque

qué reflejos

qué fondos

However, 'qué' could also be read not as a question but as an exclamation. I believe that the ambiguity is necessary for a proper reading of this poem. In both possible readings the mistrust of language and the feeling of awe in the face of reality are essential to the poem's meaning; if 'qué' is taken as a question, it is a direct question to the certainty of language; if 'qué' is taken as an exclamation, it is a recognition of reality and the world which language fails to depict faithfully. If we take into account the final lines: 'qué fallebas que no abren/ qué nada toco/ en todo', the recognition of the limitations of language, particularly as a possible substitute for reality, creates in the poem the sense of absence of substance. The 'fallebas' are a long metallic bars that serve as a latch to fasten windows or doors. This is a complementary image to those of openings. The opening is there but it is closed, barred from being open.¹¹¹ The 'fallebas' are obstructing access to whatever lies beyond the opening that the 'fallebas' are keeping out of reach. Language, words, could also be construed as these 'fallebas' since these are unable to open that to which they are making reference and they are in the way between reality and man.

The image of the abyss also has connections with the ego: 'yo abismillo' ('Tantan yo', p.256). The poem is not asserting the existence of the 'I'—at least not as a singularity—but it is rather creating a paradoxical image since the presence of the 'I' is being compared with an absence, the abyss.¹¹² The diminutive also reinforces the idea of insignificance. Girondo plays in this poem with the notion of personality as a defined individuality and compares it to a tooth with cavities: 'un

¹¹¹ This image is not unique in the book, there is also 'finales compuertas' in 'Al gravitar rotando'.

¹¹² 'Yo no tengo una personalidad; yo soy un cocktail, un conglomerado, una manifestación de personalidades' (*Espantapájaros*, p. 86); 'No soy yo quien escucha [...] No soy yo quien espera [...] No soy yo quien escribe estas palabras huérfanas' (*Persuasión de los días*, p. 146). It is pertinent to remember Dardo Scavino's comments about the surreptitious presence of the first person pronoun throughout *En la masmédula*, in 'Mimofonías', p. 532.

tanto yo San caries con sombra'. This singular 'yo' is full of holes, product of decay.¹¹³ The clear defining lines of the tooth's shape is disrupted by the cavities. This image of the tooth points to one of man's essential body openings, the mouth. The mouth is both the opening for linguistic communication, the opening for screaming as a primordial expression, as an access for nutrients and as an erogenous zone. As the 'esqueleto topo', the mouth signals spaces within spaces, since the tooth with cavities sits within the mouth. The repetition of 'yo' can also be reckoned as a criticism against a defined and unalterable ego as the pivot of experience and organisation of thought:

Con mi yo
y mil un yo y un yo
con mi yo en mi
yo mínimo
[...]
posyo del mico ancestro semirefluido en vilo ya lívido de libido
yo tantan yo
panyo
[...]
pulpo yo

The multiplication of 'yoes' does not cancel the ego's role as the agent who lives experiences, as could be interpreted from the point of view of multiplication as an attack on the uniqueness of the individual. It is, rather, the idea of a multiplication of 'yoes', each unique; that is, this is not about a mechanical reproduction but the imagination searching for the possibility of 'living' as different individuals. We can think, for example, 'Cansancio' (p. 163) from *Persuación de los días*:

¹¹³ This repetition of the presence of the poet is also reproduced by the word 'abismillo'. Here we find the 'bis', which signifies repetition, 'mi' and 'llo'.

Cansado,
sobre todo,
de estar siempre conmigo,
[...]
como si no deseara
[...]
acariciar la tierra con un vientre de oruga,
y vivir, unos meses, adentro de una piedra.

This is not the death of the author.¹¹⁴ On the contrary, this is the affirmation of the agency of experience. What Gironde is trying to say is that one life in one body is not enough, because it is limited and limiting to a single perspective which means that he will never be able to experience life the way someone or something else does. The challenge is to the presupposed supremacy of the ego as such an agent. With multiplicity also comes the impossibility or difficulty of categorisation and definition. In the poem 'Habría' Gironde speaks of 'remodelar habría los orificios psíquicos y físicos corrientes/ de tanto espectro diario que desnubre la mecha' (p. 255). For if the perspective is limited, at least the 'openings' through which he perceives must be adjusted in order to see clearly.

Abyss, in its literal meaning, links-up with the poet's relationship with the earth and the images of tombs and caverns recurrent in *En la masmédula*. To the image of the abyss we can contrast the image of the sea that does not allow the poet to reach any profundity, to get to the core of things. The abyss is an opening to the core of the earth, and although it is impossible to reach that core, it is an open access to it. Alongside this image of the abyss we find others, similar in implications, like the crater and the cave. We find the word 'cráter' at least four times

¹¹⁴ The issue of the death of the author will be discussed at length in the third chapter of this work.

in the book, 'abismo' two, 'foso' also two, 'fondo' six times, all of them take us downward into the earth. In the poem 'Menos' (p. 259) where we find the line 'de rojo vivo cráter' the context directs our reading to the idea of localization: 'sin hábitos de corcho/ hacia el estar no estando'.¹¹⁵ To be present is to be in knowledge of oneself, knowledge of the interiority that conforms to oneself. The paradox is similar to that in the poem 'Tropos'.

The enigma of being absently present—i.e. hidden—has other manifestations in spaces to which we have no visual access, as in cases such as 'inhímenes' or 'intradérmicos' of the poem 'Canes más que finales'; 'intrafondo' of 'Hay que buscarlo'; 'inóvlo' or 'inóseo' of 'El puro no'. All these are metaphors of localisation, even if the place signalled is as small as the ovum. The title of the book itself points to the fact of localising: *En la masmédula*, in the more-marrow; in the centre of what is already the centre of the bone structure, which is already within the body. These metaphors of localisation, of spaces within spaces, are to be found in a variety of ways creating with their interconnections the visual pattern of the composition.

These images and metaphors of localisation complement the series of spaces. If we take the example of 'intradérmicos' from the poem 'Canes más que finales' we will see why. The skin, dermis—more a reference to the skin rather than to the actual dermis that is located below the epidermis—is a thin layer that covers the muscles. Because of its thinness it is difficult to visualise something inside it. The image is not of something inside the body but inside the skin itself, not of something piercing it, but of something in the middle of it. Since this image brings with it the idea of confinement it does not seem to be an image of protection. On the other hand, this 'being inside' denotes the relation that Girondo wanted to establish with the category of interiority.

¹¹⁵ If the reader will recall, the image of the cork was used in *Interlunio* to describe the protagonist's relationship to and knowledge of others, p. 123.

This image of in-between—being inside something—is crucial to the understanding of Gironde's use of spaces because the spaces are possibilities of action, possibilities of movement. To be in the middle of something, surrounded by all sides, points to an idea of space not as emptiness but as totality:

El espacio está siempre lleno: *no es nunca el receptáculo indiferente en el que un sujeto o un individuo volcarían su presencia manifiesta, su dimensión corporal o su espontaneidad discursiva, creativa o "artística"—fónica, gráfica, visual—, está antes poblado de un rumor anónimo y multitudinario, el murmullo del lenguaje mudo de la muchedumbre de las cosas (naturales y artificiales), del tráfico de los objetos y de las colecciones nómadas de hábitos. Inscribirse en él como individuo es cuestión de marcar distancias.*¹¹⁶

In *En la masmédula* spaces are marked by distance, by the relationships of proximity whether within one image or with other images of openings. Space is not treated as an abstract category, except in poems like 'Plexilio'; but rather it is presented or represented by individual images that combined evoke the idea of interconnected spaces. The spaces in the skin and in the body, those formed by an embrace or in the environment and in the world, they all belong to a same order. Spaces become more than backgrounds against which events are played, they become things in themselves. But the spaces in *En la masmédula* can also function as passages or containers of interior spaces. This is emphasised by the reference to movement between different layers. This transit between spaces is exemplified by metaphors of immersion. The reader can find this several times throughout the poems, for example: 'pezlampo inmerso' ('Hay que buscarlo'), 'inmerso en el subyo intimísimo'

¹¹⁶ Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad*, p. 19.

('Habría'), 'foso inmerso adentro' ('Hasta morirla', p. 241). There is a particularly interesting example of this idea of transit, of passing from one space into another that points to *Hamlet*. This is one of the works of literature with which the book is in constant dialogue.¹¹⁷ But even more than the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark, it is Ophelia who is the protagonist in the references to the play. In the seventh scene of act four Ophelia dies. She drowns while picking flowers next to a brook.¹¹⁸ The figure of Ophelia slowly sinking into the waters of the brook appears twice in *En la masmédula*, in 'Ella': 'las trenzas náyades de Ofelia';¹¹⁹ and in 'Ante el sabor inmóvil' (p. 250):

y Ofelia pura costa sea un pescado reflejo de rocío de esclerosada túnica
sin lastre
un fósil loto amóvil entre remansos muslos puros juncos de espasmo
un maxilar de luna sobre un canto rodado
tierno espectro fluctuante del novilunio arcaico dromedario
lejos ya de su neuro dubitabundo exnovio psiquisauce
aunque el sabor no cambie
y cualquier lacio cuajo invista nuevos huecos ante los ídem lodos
expartos
bostezantes
peste con veste huéspedes del macrobarro grávido de muerte

Both references to this character are related to her death in the brook. Ophelia is slowly being immersed from one space—air, the world—

¹¹⁷ The subject of the literary, artistic or cultural interconnections of the book is not one that can be properly explored at this time. However, I would like to point out a few clear links and then concentrate on two specific examples. We find in 'posnausea' a reference to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, and to Stephan Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* in the title of a poem 'Por vocación de dado'. And as I have already pointed there is a most interesting connection that could be made with James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a nocturnal, dream-like and highly experimental work.

¹¹⁸ *Hamlet*, IV.7.191.

¹¹⁹ In Greek mythology the naiads are the nymphs related to rives, brooks, fountains and lakes, Angel María Garibay K, *Mitología Griega, dioses y heroes*, Sepan cuántos, 31, 20th edn (Mexico: Porrúa, 1993), p. 176.

through different layers first water, then mud: the earth.¹²⁰ In the description of Ophelia's death by queen Gertrude clothing is mentioned twice. There is also a connection with layers in these references since the layers of Ophelia's dress absorb the water and become heavy; the water seeps through different layers of clothing just as Ophelia moves through different spaces. Ophelia's sinking body is an image of transit between different layers. There are obvious differences between these layers — density, colour, texture—but what is consequential is the movement between them. Just as the other images and metaphors signified the crossing into an interiority, so does Ophelia sinking into the earth. It is another figure of interpenetration, Ophelia's death is a movement into the element to which the openings gesture to, the 'lodos expartos/ bostezantes'. The movement between the different layers is, on a different scale, the possibility of going into the other so as to know it more intimately. Ophelia becomes one 'body' inside another—she becomes the contrary image to the cork—and yet the experience cannot be known to anyone else, it remains closed like the 'fallebas'. The opposite image would be that of Lazarus's resurrection that we find in 'Habría': 'un lazariendo anhelo que todavía se yergue'. This is not intended to be Lazarus himself, but the resurrection of desire. However, the fact remains that the poet chose the figure of Lazarus to present this idea. The contrast is clear, Lazarus comes out of the grave, Ophelia sinks. The dialectical relationship between them illustrates the idea of transit between spaces; transit, in this context, would be the possibility of having open access to a different space and thus the possibility of knowing it intimately.

A different image of transitivity is the 'huésped'. The term implies interiority since a guest is one is someone's home and it also implies temporality since a guest is not permanent by definition. In *En la masmédula*, this figure, who is not a defined character, is mentioned

¹²⁰ Gironde refers to this when he speaks thus 'explore los estratos de su ámbito sin sino' ('Ante el sabor inmóvil', p. 250).

eight times throughout the book. Three of these instances in close proximity to death: 'huéspedes difuntos/ trasvestidos de soplo' ('Rada anímica', p. 232), 'con más de un muerto huesped rondando' ('Por vocación de dado') and 'huéspedes del macrobarro grávido de muerte' ('Ante el sabor inmovil'). The transitivity of death points to the disintegration of the factors that impede true communion with others. The transition between one space and another is also signified by impurity. This impurity is there from the opening of the book 'la pura impura mezcla'. This 'mezcla' is used to build bridges, a literal image of union. Impurity, mixture and bridges point to the action of contamination in the sense of making something impure by contact or mixture. Gironde seeks this contamination because this is a way to be in contact with others. Transition points to a certain degree of contamination. Only something isolated is pure, but something isolated is not alive in the sense Gironde considers this. Contamination is necessary, and this is necessary from the basic levels of language:

No he pretendido helás! crear un idioma propio. Los acoplamientos, incestos y pequeños monstruos idiomáticos que he conjurado responden, por una parte, a la necesidad de recurrir a medios más expresivos—más explosivos—y que concuerden mejor con el contenido emotivo—no sentimental, sino estético—del poema, y, por otra, a la urgencia de encontrar un antídoto contra el pudor y sus cuantiosas mordazas. Si para ti ¿el intento? es una completa frustración, para otros—por suerte—es todo lo contrario y representa para mí una verdadera liberación.¹²¹

What Gironde calls his 'pequeños monstruos idiomáticos' are precisely the poet's attack on purity. The contamination of language could be seen at different levels of the text. It could be found at the

¹²¹ Extract from a letter from Gironde 5 February, 1955, in OC, image number 27.

acoustic level of the text in the saturation of sounds which prompted critics to think of these poems as jitanjáforas. It could also be thought of contamination in relation to grammar in the apparently chaotic creation of new words. I think that this contamination can be understood visually in the proliferation of cavities. Under the light of these new elements we can see that a porous body is open to a better communication with others than a closed smooth one.

The number of passages is also addressed in the use the plural voice, for example in the poem 'Cansancio'. The poem talks about the lack of meaning in man's actions and ideas.¹²² In 'Cansancio' of *En la masmédula* almost everything of which the poet is tired is in the plural: 'replanteos', 'redialogos', 'vueltas y revueltas', 'ideitas reputitas', 'resonancias huecas', etc. And to over stress the feeling of repetition the prefix 're' is added to some of the words. This prefix signifies repetition and intensification. For the time being and in the context of the images presently analysed, I would like to play close attention to the following lines of the poem:

recansado de los recodos y repliegues y recovecos y re-
fortes de lo remanoseado y relamido hasta en sus más
recónditos
reductos (p. 263)

These images of multiple holes are not based on the nature of things themselves as with the honeycomb, but are produced by repetition of single entities: 'recodos', 'repliegues', 'recovecos', 'recónditos reductos'—this last one also means remote and isolated. These cases form images that if not similar in nature to the ones discussed previously, they are by effect. That is, the poem evokes an image of multiplicity of

¹²² In 'Cansancio' of *Persuasión de los días* we read: 'como si no deseara/ esperar la rompiente con un cutis de playa,/ ofrecer, al rocío, dos senos de magnolia,/ acariciar la tierra con un vientre de oruga,/ y vivir, unos meses, adentro de una piedra.' (p. 163)

objects which would not normally be found assembled together. These images convey interiorities and depths. They evoke several spaces at different or simultaneous depths. This structure can be illustrated by an image in the poem 'Topatumba', where the reader encounters the lovers' bodies entwined in each other suggesting folds, nooks and layers of flesh: 'más nudo de musgo entremuslos'. This image is of the knot formed by the two lovers as much as about the confused limits of each body. In this image Gironde defies definition and categorization, as if in their embrace the bodies would lose their particular identities to become one single unified being; like a knot. Even if it comes from several ropes a knot is still one single thing.

What this image of the knot implies as well is that there are multiple layers of flesh that, in their turn, suggest interior spaces, tiny crevices in and on the indistinguishable body-mass. We can think of this image as being sculptural since it gives us a sense of mass and planes. This is reinforced by the sense of depth created by the knot: 'anuda más/más nudo'. We see the external sinuosity of the body-mass but we also know that those tangled bodies coil deeper than our gaze can reach. Interior spaces like these suggested here are essential to the landscape of *En la masmédula*. The image of the lovers in 'Topatumba' is a multiplication of spaces, a dissemination that places them next to each other, on top of each other, inside one another. This is like a topographical map of the intertwined bodies. And in this way two bodies can be confused into one, they become one even if momentarily and only to our perception. The communion, more than communication, between the two lovers reminds us of Gironde's search for that 'universal solidarity', the search for the intimate knowledge of things. We could think here of Francis Ponge whose search was similar to Gironde's. Ponge used the language of his poems to approach things; he did this by a detailed description of the object, the particular circumstances in which he interacted with it and his own reactions to the interaction:

Mais ce n'est pas assez avoir dit de l'orange que d'avoir rappelé sa façon particulière de parfumer l'air et de réjouir son bourreau. Il faut mettre l'accent sur la coloration glorieuse du liquide qui en résulte et qui, mieux que le jus de citron, oblige le larynx à s'ouvrir largement pour la prononciation du mot comme pour l'ingestion du liquide, sans aucune moue appréhensive de l'avant-bouche dont il ne fait pas hérissier les papilles.¹²³

Language in Ponge became a bridge between the object and the poet, the larynx most open wide as much as possible for the juice of the fruit as for the pronounciation of its name. Language in Ponge becomes a common ground between the different areas that converge in the experience. The experience of the object becomes knowledge, not only intellectually but intimately; that is, it is not only information but knowledge that becomes part of the poet as much as the ingestion of the fruit itself. In Girondo's case the drive for the knowledge of the object is not precisely the same; Girondo wants to penetrate the object, to reach its inner core. In this sense Girondo's solidarity is phenomenal: he wants to find the essence of each being. Not, however, to exchange the thing for the idea but in order to transform his knowledge and to accept and respect the plurality of things that live.

In the sense just established the image of the knot in 'Topatumba' becomes that unification of the two bodies into one indistinctive being. This image of the knot is stressed by the presence of ropes throughout the poem. For example the word 'topa' from the title 'Topatumba' is a line or cord that runs along a mast. There are also expressions such as 'ízala tú', which link playfully with the action of rising and falling:

¹²³ Francis Ponge, 'L'orange', in *Le Parti pris des choses*, ed. by Ian Higgins (London: Athlone, 1979), pp. 43-44 (p. 44).

izala tú mi tumba
así
ya en tí mi tea
toda mi toda llama tuya
destiérrame
aletea
lava ya emana el alma (p. 254)

'Tumba' and 'tumbo', both present in the poem, play with the meanings of rising, falling and the grave.¹²⁴ 'Tumbo' comes from the verb 'tumbar', which means to fall violently, but also to roll around in a wave like manner. The sound of the poem recreates the rising and falling, the lovers' tumbles: 'te tato y topo y tumbo y te arpo/ y libo y libo tu halo'. The effect of the movement comes from within the poem itself with the reiterations of the letter 't' and the conjunction 'y'. 'Topatumba' is not just an erotic poem, it is not only the presentation of the sexual encounter. It is a very intimate love poem that discloses a private and tender moment between two lovers: 'mi más nimio mío/ mi bisvidita te ando'. These personal expressions are far from the carnivalesque eroticism of his earlier books.¹²⁵ The reader can see how common expressions of the likes of 'you are my life' or 'my better half' are transformed into a personal expression: 'bisvidita'. This compressed form is derived from 'bis' that indicates repetition and 'vidita', the diminutive of life: my second life. The use of the diminutive makes the poem intimate, tender, and the repetitions of 'i' creates a youthful feeling. The poet presents his desires, their actions, and his lover's body, without hesitation. He openly refers to her 'halo', 'trascielo', and 'corola'. And he requests that she explores his body in another compressed metaphor: 'cátame tú evapulpo'. 'Catar' is to try, to get to know. 'Cátame tú' is the

¹²⁴ There is a similar movement in the poem 'Habría', there we read 'lazariento anhelo que todavía se yerge'(p. 255).

¹²⁵ See for example, 'Exvoto' of *Veinte poemas*, p. 15.

request for her touch. The image of 'evapulpo' plays with the fusion of the conceptual content in and around Eve—the first woman—and an octopus. The tentacles' suckers are a meaningful metaphor in Girondo's imagery, for they are a passage way between the two bodies; they are tiny open spaces through which bodies can truly communicate.

The limits of our physical existence, with their psychological and existential corollaries, underline the transcendence of spaces within *En la mas médula*. It is through them that one surface can become a passageway into another body rather than remaining a limitation. This is the reason why there is a constant presence of porous surfaces and suckers, like in the aforementioned 'evapulpo'. The suckers allow the process of permeability through which one body can become part of the other and vice versa. This is an integration from one body into another in a generalised way since the suckers and the pores of the skin are not as localised as the mouth for example. In this context the body is associated with the idea of being in contact with other spaces. The transition from one space to another is also present in metaphors of ingestion, inhaling, to bring from the outside into one's body. For example, in 'Topatumba' the words 'catar' of 'cátame tú' and 'libar' of 'libo y libo' refer to ingestion and what takes place is the transition from one space into another: the other becoming part of who ingests it. In other instances there is not an entity or actor who performs the ingestion. If there is one, it is not a clearly defined character but agents classified by generic names. The action of ingestion is isolated: it is something that takes place regardless of who is performing the action. In 'Al gravitar rotando' (p. 221) the reader finds this word-compound as a single line: 'endosorbienglutido'. By isolating this word as a line in the poem, Girondo is emphasising the action in itself, even though in the following line of the poem he clarifies who is being ingested and who is doing the ingestion—the poet is being ingested, he is inside already, and the 'engendros móviles' are doing the ingestion. If we break the word down we get the prefix 'endo', which

means 'inside' or 'interior'; 'sorbien', which refers to the verb 'sorber', to sip or suck; and, 'glutido', which comes from 'deglutir', to swallow. In this same poem we find 'chupaporos pulposas', an image that takes us back to the 'evapulpo' image. This emphasises what has been said about the suckers and pores as open doorways between one body and another. The 'chupaporos' is a double image since pores expel substances from the body and the 'chupa' highlights the opposite action, they also suck. The reader is not told what is being transferred between the bodies. The importance is in the act, and whether its connotations are positive or negative is another matter. For example, the reader finds a variation on these metaphors of ingestion in the poem 'Por vocación de dado' (pp. 233-234) the line 'deshinhalar lo hueco'. This movement is not only exhaling, it is to take back, to dis-inhale; to move backwards in time, to not have done it in the first time. This, of course, is impossible and the word 'deshinhalar' remains there as the trace of what took place. The movement between inside and outside is not performed in a specific direction, from the outside to the inside, from the world into the man, or from a large into the small. These exchanges, these images serve as open doorways that allow the movement between spaces, thus there is a deeper connection between them than contiguity. It is possible to extend this idea to the very fabric of the poems in the use of complex words-compounds, with the overabundance of the prefixes and suffixes that indicates not so much a lack in language but the words' point of fusion. In their use Gironde is emphasising the union between words, as much as in his use of images and metaphors of transit.

The point of fusion, the possibility of bridging two separate bodies, empty spaces that serve as passageways create the connections that form the rhizome-like form of the book; also, all these point to the dialectic movement between the inside and the outside. The structure of images analysed in this section 'corresponds' to the two levels analysed in the previous ones. The proliferation of images of spaces suggests that

the whole structure of the book is isomorphic. *En la masmédula* does not correspond to the outside world, and it does not correspond either, to the inside world; but rather it evokes a spatial form which would allow an imaginative bridge between those two in a way in which the experiences of both would go beyond their exteriorities. Heidegger thought that the foundations of poetry lay in the space between the earth and the heavens, between the world—that which is codified by man—and the earth—what was there previous to such codifications.¹²⁶ *En la masmédula* enacts this in-between, the middle ground where the earth and the world, subjectivity and objectivity, inside and outside, come together.

2.

You find my words dark.
Darkness is in our souls do you
not think?¹²⁷

During the previous section I concentrated my interpretation on the phenomenon of repetition in *En la masmédula*. I showed that through these repetitions patterns were formed, which in their turn evoked a spatial form. At the end of that section I analysed images of openings and spaces, which besides adding to the 'corresponding' levels it suggested that the spatial form of the book could be visualised as a rhizome. I concluded that these spaces signify the possibility of access, of movement between different and seemingly unconnected areas. In the present section I will concentrate on this idea of connection. However, no longer in regards to the structure of the book but concentrating on images, metaphors and concepts which imply a connection.

¹²⁶ Gianni Vattimo, *El fin de la modernidad: Nihilismo y hermenéutica en la cultura posmoderna*, trans by Alberto L. Bixio (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2000), pp. 61-81.

¹²⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Folio Society, 1998), p. 48.

In the first part of the present section I will analyse the significance of two different plays in *En la masmédula*: *Hamlet* and *La vida es sueño*. I will concentrate on two elements from these plays: the characters and the night. I believe that in *En la masmédula* the presence of Hamlet and Segismundo are meant to be read as nodules that contain similar experiences to the ones the poet is looking to convey. The second element that I will take from the plays is the night. The correspondence between the nocturnal element of the plays and in Girondo is the bridge into the vast territory of the night in Girondo's poetics. I will establish the importance of this element in his work and will perform an analysis of the poem 'Noche tótem'. From this analysis will come the next and final step of this chapter which will concentrate on the category of nothingness in Girondo's poetry. This will be grounded on an analysis of the poem 'El puro no'. From Hamlet and Segismundo to the night and on to nothingness the structure of this chapter suggests that *En la masmédula* is not only an linguistically intrinsic work as scholars have previously concluded but also one that it is very much concerned with exteriority and communication.¹²⁸

I will now explore some reasons why Hamlet and Segismundo are referred to in Girondo's *En la masmédula*, and the importance these references may have for the poetics of Girondo. I think that ultimately Girondo is identifying himself with the way that these characters 'exist' in the world. These two characters can be taken to be symbols of the relationship between the individual and reality. This relationship between the individual and what lies outside of himself became a seminal concern in the poems of *Persuasión de los días*. And it is through the second half of the 1930s that Girondo writes a series of articles analysing current

¹²⁸ For example, Tamara Kamenszain writes 'si hay un autor en Latinoamérica que desencadena las palabras de su lastre "expresivo", revirtiendo su ensombrecida materialidad hasta ponerla en un luminoso primer plano, ése es el Girondo de *En la masmédula*', in 'Doblando a Girondo', p. 16; and Francine Masiello writes that 'el lenguaje, en el momento en el que llega a *En la masmédula*, adquiere una forma concreta por su cuenta, alejado de funciones referenciales comunes, ahora parte de una aislada representación en la página', in 'Oliverio Girondo: naturaleza y artificio', in OC, pp. 404-416 (p. 409).

world affairs and Argentina's role in that context, but which are underpinned by the very question of reality and the individual:

Nuestro profundo hartazgo por Europa nos implusó, hace ya varios años, a sugerir la conveniencia de dirigirle un saludo expresivo y recogernos, momentáneamente, dentro del propio cascarón.

Justificaban este retraimiento malhumorado—entre muchas razones—dos apremios gemelos: el de impedir que nos contagiara el odio que la carcome y el de *palpar la topografía de nuestro cerebro y de nuestro suelo*, hasta hallarnos en condiciones de cumplir, con dignidad, nuestro destino. ('Nuestra actitud ante el desastre', p. 327)¹²⁹

These articles are about what was to be done in the then current state of affairs, not only of Argentina but of the Western world at the moment of the Second World War. This is the context in which I think the presence of the characters can be set, at the beginning of one of the heights of the existentialist debate.

There are in *En la masmédula* four references to *Hamlet*. The first two in the poem 'Ante el sabor inmóvil' (pp. 250-251):

y Ofelia pura costa sea [...]

tierno espectro fluctuante del novilunio arcaico dromedario

lejos ya de su neuro dubitabundo exnovio psiquisauce (p. 250)

A third one is found in the poem 'El pentotal a qué' (pp. 229-230):

los necrocopiensos con ancestros de polvo

el "to be" a qué

el "not to be" a qué (p. 229)

¹²⁹ My emphasis.

The fourth one is found in the poem 'Ella' (pp. 261-262) and it deals directly with Ophelia: 'las trenzas náyades de Ofelia' (p. 262). At this time I am interested in the figure of Hamlet and what he represents for Girondo, and particularly its significance in *En la masmédula*. As we can see from the previous examples the references to Hamlet are not as explicit as those to Ophelia. The references to the character of Hamlet are made in a roundabout way, he is not named. Girondo is focusing on Hamlet's introspection: 'neuro dubitabundo exnovio psiquisauce' and the direct quote in English from the famous monologue in the first scene of the third act. For Girondo Hamlet seems to represent doubt about the reality of the self, the possibilities of action and the repercussions a particular action would have in the world.

Jean S. Calhoun opens his essay 'Hamlet and the Circumference of Action' with two references on the figure of Hamlet and the issue of agency.¹³⁰ The references are by English poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Samuel Johnson; for both poets Hamlet is defined by his lack of action. For Bruce Danner the fact that Hamlet speaks daggers but uses none (III.2.387) testifies that Hamlet relies 'on language when he should most act'.¹³¹ In Hamlet there is an effacement of agency that opens the way to language as the representation of action, language as the subject's presence in the world:

That I, the son of a dear father murther'd,
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
 Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words.¹³²

That Hamlet decides not to act but just speak is essential for understanding his importance in Girondo's book, for it seems that the

¹³⁰ Jean S. Calhoun, 'Hamlet and the Circumference of Action', *Renaissance News*, 15 (1962), 281-298 (p. 281).

¹³¹ Bruce Danner, 'Speaking Daggers', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54 (2003), 29-62 (p. 29).

¹³² *Hamlet*, II. 2. 579.

identification with the Shakespearean character comes into play based on supplanting with language the possibilities of personal action. Language is, of course, the poet's field of action. However, it is not possible to argue that action and speech are the same. Hamlet doubts his own self and the reality that surrounds him, the expression of his personal turmoil and his place within the play is confined to language. In a similar way, Gironde is enclosed in his expression. This is why by the end of *En la masmédula* in 'Cansancio' (pp. 263-264) he writes:

y de los intimísimos remimos y recaricias de la lengua
y de sus regastados páramos vocablos y reconjugaciones y recópulas
y sus remuertas reglas y necropolis de reputrefactas palabras
simplemente cansado (p. 264)

This expression of tiredness with his confinement to language is also found in both of the plays. *Hamlet* and Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* both deal with confinement. For Hamlet 'Denmark's a prison' and Segismundo was locked in the dark tower by his father, 'que cuna y sepulcro fue/ esta torre para mí'.¹³³ In both plays confinement is not limited to a physical enclosure—Elsinore and the tower—but to man himself. Segismundo from *La vida es sueño* is mentioned in the poem 'Postnotaciones (pp. 247-248):

Con tedio y tiempo muerto cogitabundo exhumo
tibias lívidas líbidos invertebrados ocios
restos quizás de sueño del ensoñar trasueños
segismundiando digo (p. 247)

In the final act of *La vida es sueño* Segismundo declares:

¹³³ *Hamlet*, II. 2. 243; Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *La primera version de La vida es sueño*, critical ed., intro., and notes by J. M. Ruano de la Haza, *Hispanic Studies Textual Research and Criticism*, 5 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), p. 136, I. 1. 211.

Luego bien desto se advierte;
 luego bien desto se nota
 que este sueño es todo vida,
 y esta vida es sueño toda.¹³⁴

Segismundo is a symbol of constant introspection. The limits of reality and dreams are constantly assaulted until both worlds bleed into each other. The perception of reality is thus called into question. The separation between the two worlds, the individual and reality, is no longer a smooth straightforward division. The manner in which Gironde presents this interlacing between dreams and reality is by recurring again to repetition: 'restos quizás de sueño del ensoñar trasueños'. What is suggested in this line is that remnants of dreams are folded into other dreams which in their turn are dreams of more deep hidden dreams, the 'trasueños'. Segismundo, like Hamlet, is not named. He is transformed into a gerund: 'segismundiando'.¹³⁵ Through this transformation a continuous action is represented, Gironde *being* like Segismundo constantly questioning the limits of reality and dreams.

However 'segismundiando' can also function as an adverb, it qualifies the action, the state of (non)acting of the poet; that is, his constant introspection, his constant doubting his self and the world. There is a sense of isolation in the figure of Segismundo as well. At the beginning of the play we find him in chains, alone in his imprisonment.¹³⁶ 'Postnotaciones' is a poem where the isolated condition of the poet is reiterated: 'úniqueja isola', 'tan solitariamente acompañado', and later:

¹³⁴ III. 3. 2940.

¹³⁵ Similar to 'yollando' of 'Yolleo'.

¹³⁶ *La vida es sueño*, Segismundo's condition is made clear by a stage note between lines 115 and 116; Margaret S. Maurin, 'The Monster, the Sepulchre and the Dark: Related Patterns of Imagery in *La vida es sueño*', in *Hispanic Review*, 35 (1967) 161-178 (pp. 172-176).

Entre restos de restas
y mi prole de ceros a la izquierda
sólo la soledad
de este natal país de nadie nadie
me acompaña

That no-man's land is with him. The 'ceros a la izquierda' are a reference to meaninglessness since a zero to the left of a number has no bearings on the number itself; it is there, but it does not count. Earlier in the poem Gironde presents the reader with this image of isolation and introspection:

aletea el silencio de mi chamberego cuervo
aunque estoy vivo
creo (p. 248)

Gironde, too, doubts about his existence. He thinks that he is alive. There is here a reference to Edgar A. Poe's poem 'The Raven': 'chamberego cuervo' can be read as the raven inside the chamber of the self.¹³⁷ The image in 'Posnotaciones' is ambiguous. In Poe's poem the raven is perched on a bust of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom and reason, repeating 'nevermore'.¹³⁸ In Gironde it is not clear whether both the 'chamberego' and the 'cuervo' are one single thing or if there is a raven inside the 'chamberego'—this is also an image of interiority. However, both Segismundo and the protagonist of 'The Raven' are found confined to a particular room, and darkness is an essential element in both works.¹³⁹ The image of the 'chamberego cuervo' in 'Postnotaciones' gives space and depth to the introspection that I have been analysing

¹³⁷ The raven in Poe's poem comes in from the dark of night into the chamber, Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Raven', *Complete Poems and Selected Essays*, ed. by Richard Gray (London: Dent, 1993), pp. 71-74.

¹³⁸ 'The Raven', pp. 72-73

¹³⁹ Although Segismundo does not spend the totality of the play inside his prison, he carries with him a metaphorical prison; 'The Raven' does take place completely inside a chamber during the night.

here, because it creates a room for the ego in which a person—the protagonist of Poe's poem—has confined himself to read and think about his lost love. Gironde's 'chamberego' is an image of introspection inside which we find another man being introspective. As was discussed during the first section of this chapter, this would be another example of that use of repetitive imagery to create a pattern. In this particular poem we find the following repetition of spaces: 'caries de nada', 'sípido hueco adulto', 'chamberego', 'demasiado pozo'.¹⁴⁰ From this I can conclude that the existential feeling of confinement in Gironde's poem is creating a link to other similar expressions such as Hamlet, Segismundo, and Poe's 'The Raven'.

It is particularly important to take into account the way in which both Segismundo and Hamlet appear in Gironde's book. While Ophelia is named twice, the reference to these characters is made through their distinguishing attributes: Hamlet is the 'neuro dubitabundo exnovio psiquisauce' and Segismundo 'sueño del ensoñar trasueños/ segismundiando digo'. That they are not named is important because it is not the whole characters that are meaningful for Gironde. It is rather their particular introspection and subsequent doubt about themselves and the world that makes them constitutional to the overall meaning of *En la masmédula* and not just mere literary references. Gironde is creating a triangle between Hamlet, Segismundo and himself. The characters' introspection is linked with his own 'yolleo'. These three characters—Gironde included as the voice of the poem—become interlacing symbols of introspection and doubt about the limits between dreams and reality, madness and reason. Ophelia becomes an indication of the collapse of the walls that keep separated sanity from madness:

¹⁴⁰ As a side note, in this poem I also found another reference to Poe's story 'The Pith and the Pendulum' in the 'cross-reference' of two different parts of the poem 'demasiado pozo' and 'constancia de péndulo'. For the presence of Edgar Allan Poe in Latin American Literature see John Eugene Englekirk, *Edgar Allan Poe in Hispanic Literature* (New York: Instituto de las Españas en los Estados Unidos, 1934) and "The Raven" in Spanish America', repr. *The Spanish Review*, Vol. 1, 2 (1934).

Ophelia's madness may therefore be viewed as the result, not merely of the death of Polonius, but of the disruption of the total area within which she has customarily acted. With her father dead, Laertes absent, and Hamlet rejecting her in the bitterest terms, she has lost the means of defining her own identity.¹⁴¹

Despite the problems that this interpretation of Ophelia's madness may present, such as the reduction of Ophelia's identity to male extrinsic elements, it establishes a clear demarcation of Ophelia within the context of the play. That is, it presents a hypothesis in which the changes in the external world have a direct and devastating impact upon Ophelia's interiority. The distinction between inside (Ophelia) and the outside (Denmark, Elsinore) are gradually eroded away allowing both worlds to blend. It is the division between interiority and exteriority what matters for Gironde, the expansion of the inside towards the outside. The presence of the characters from *Hamlet* and *La vida es sueño* is an undeniable gesture towards the outside of the text.

If Gironde felt dissatisfaction in relationships with the world, *En la mas médula* can be seen as his attempt to present an alternative since in this book he attempts to give form to the possibilities of interpenetration between the world and the individual mediated by the poem. That is, the poem for the Gironde of *En la mas médula* is neither a commentary on reality nor on his inner life, but a space meant to bridge them. The poems of *En la mas médula* function as openings between these seemingly separated spaces, the world and the individual as Robert Duncan wrote: 'our language as life plays in the extension of our lifetime upon the threshold of consciousness between what man is and his Cosmos'.¹⁴² In other words, the language of poetry extends beyond the interiority of the individual towards the open, exterior universe. With this

¹⁴¹ Calhoun, 'Hamlet and the Circumference of Action', p. 283.

¹⁴² Robert Duncan, 'Towards an Open Universe', in *A Selected Prose*, ed. by Robert J. Bertholf (New York: New Directions, 1995), pp. 1-12 (p. 9).

in mind, it becomes relevant that the poem that opens *En la masmédula* is 'La mezcla' (p. 219):

la viva mezcla
la total mezcla plena
la pura impura mezcla que me merma los machimbres el almamasa tensa
las
tercas hembras tuercas
la mezcla
sí
la mezcla con que adherí mis puentes

The reference to bridges with which the poem closes establishes a paradigm for the whole book: the interconnection between spaces. The bridges of this poem are a unifying metaphor between the different spaces of the poet's reality:

The poet is the mediator; he connects the near to the far. The merchant who also brings close and unites, the river that is nothing but movement and passage [...]. Not only is poetry supposed to accomplish this mediation and, by accomplishing it, accomplish itself, but it must first make the mediation possible. It is not simply the instrument that elements and men make use of to meet each other; it expresses and forms the very possibility of this meeting, and this meeting is the basis and the truth of what meets.¹⁴³

'La mezcla' gives form to this metaphorical bridge between the different spaces. But it seeks to be more than just a bridge. The poem is not about a bridge, but about the mixture with which the boards of the

¹⁴³ Maurice Blanchot, 'The "Sacred" Speech of Hölderlin', in *The Work of Fire*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp 111-131 (p. 115).

bridge are kept in place: 'la viva mezcla/ la total mezcla plena'. And this mixture that unites is the language of the poems which is a combination of the very spaces and things it seeks to unite. Blanchot goes on to conclude that 'the poem is in fact that which holds together [...] so that what does appear can maintain itself in a shaky but lasting agreement.'¹⁴⁴ A reference to such an agreement can be found in the poem 'Hay que buscarlo' (p. 226) where Gironde writes about where to search for the poem. It is important to note the spatial connotations that this poem introduces. From the title the reader is presented with a localisation in space. This is restated by the first word of the body of the poem 'En la eropsiquis'. That is, the poem is something that can be localised. However, it remains ambiguous whether the localisation is of the poem before being presented to others, i.e. the readers, even the poet as reader of his own work, and thus only localisable by the poet himself; or, the localisation is of the poem as it exists for every possible reader. The key, I think, is in the poem's ambiguous existence. A poem is both an internal and an external event and Gironde strived to express this ambiguity. As it was made clear by the poem 'La mezcla', poetic language is a mixture and as such it is made of different elements. Its origin is both internal and external since language gives form to the inner reality of the poet with a language (Spanish in this case) that came to the infant from external circumstances (being born in Argentina). In 'Hay que buscarlo' Gironde writes: '*entre* epitelios de alba o resacas insomnes', four out of the seven words from this fragment signal to a state in between. 'Entre' is self-explanatory; the 'epitelio' is a cellular tissue that forms the outermost layer of different areas of the body such as the mucous membranes or the skin and therefore it signifies simultaneously separation and union; 'alba' is the sun breaking at the horizon, this is an image of the limits between the night and the day; 'resaca' is the movement of the waves after they have broken on the shore, and it is, in

¹⁴⁴ Blanchot, 'The "Sacred" Speech of Hölderlin', p. 125.

this way, an image of a movable limit that crosses between two territories. All these images gesture to the poem's ambiguous state. The emphasis on such ambiguity will aid the poet to suggest the spatial qualities of the poem.

In the night the perception of the particular visual qualities of things and of people is diminished by the absence of light. This seems to present the world with a veil of homogeneity. In the night particular limits seem to be softened in a kind of *sfumato* where the end of one thing and the beginning of another seem to blend. According to Emmanuel Levinas:

Whatever may be the physico-mathematical explanation of the light which fills our universe, phenomenologically it is a condition for phenomena, that is, for meaning. In existing an object exists for someone, is destined for someone, already leans toward an inwardness and, without being absorbed in it, gives itself. What comes from the outside illuminated is comprehended, that is, comes from ourselves. Light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us. Property constitutes the world: through the light the world is given and apprehended.¹⁴⁵

In the night particular phenomena would seem to blend into something larger and unifying where the loss of specific contours suggests the loss of limits between the inside and outside that in the light of day seemed contained and independent. In the night the existing objects and 'the someone' to whom those objects are destined to do not seem to exist in the same relationship as during the day, since in the night even the inwardness of that someone is effaced. This veil of homogeneity would counter Girondo's sense of the superficiality of human existence and it would give him a condition where surfaces could be bridged.

¹⁴⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. and intro. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 48.

Night is a recurrent theme throughout Girondo's work, from 'Nocturno' (p. 10) and 'Otro nocturno' (p. 20) in *Veinte poemas* through *Interlunio*—this is the period when the moon is not visible from earth—to the 'Nocturnos' from *Persuasión de los días*.¹⁴⁶ In *En la masmédula* the references to the night, sleep, dreams, insomnia, the moon, and sunrise are constant. Here are a few examples:

'al rito negro al alba con su esperezo lleno de gorriones' ('La mezcla', p. 219)

'con todo sueño insomne' ('Al gravitar rotando', p. 222)

'fiebre de noche' ('Hay que buscarlo', p. 226)

'al desensueño al alba' ('Por vocación de dado', p. 233)

'Noctivozmusgo insomne' ('Gristenia', p. 240)

'entre las extremidades de la noche' ('A mí', p. 258)

I have chosen these examples at random from beginning to end of the book in order to show the constant presence of the nocturnal element in *En la masmédula*. The apex of these nocturnal representations is the poem 'Noche tótem' (p. 220) where the night becomes an ambiguous symbol of absence and presence:

Son los trasfondos otros de la in extremis médium
que es la noche al entreabrir los huesos
las mitoformas otras
aliardidas presencias semimorfos

¹⁴⁶ There are also extensive references throughout the poems.

sotopausas sosoplos
de la enllagada libido posesa
que es la noche sin vendas
son las grislumbres otras tras esmeriles párpados videntes
los atónitos yesos de lo inmóvil ante el refluído herido interrogante
que es la noche ya lívida
son las cribadas voces
las suburbanas sangres de la ausencia de remansos omóplatos
las agrinsomnes dragas hambrientas del ahora con su limo de nada
los idos pasos otros de la incorpórea ubicua también otra
escarbando lo incierto
que puede ser la muerte con su demente célibe muleta
y es la noche
y deserta

In the opening of this poem the reader faces an enigmatic figure, the 'trasfondos otros'. A 'trasfondo' is what lies beyond appearance or beyond the visible bottom of a thing; for example, the back of a cave. In addition to this figure of obscurity the 'trasfondos' in the poem are modified by the adjective 'otros'. This adjective transforms the figure into one of double displacement. First, the 'trasfondos' displaces the substance behind the visible. Second, these 'trasfondos' are other, that is, a plurality of shapes that indicates the absence of the unseen substance. The 'trasfondos' are constantly shifting into something else, they are continuously becoming other.

The 'trasfondos' that Gironde is writing about are the 'trasfondos' of death which are the night: 'son los trasfondos otros de la in extremis médium/ *que es la noche*'. At first, 'in extremis' and 'médium' seem to collide. But both signal to a state of *limitness*, the state of being a limit. 'In extremis' is being at the extreme end of life, being not at the threshold between life and death but rather *being* the threshold itself.

This state of being is corroborated by 'médium', since a medium is the person who functions as a passageway between the world of the living and the world of the dead. But a medium is not *at* the gate between the two worlds, it momentarily *becomes* the gate between them. Night is what we can see, where we can be, night and death are paired in the poem as the visible/invisible aspects of the same substance. The darkness of the night is compared to death as it opens the bones: 'la noche al entreabrir los huesos'. The core of the bones is the pivotal metaphor of the whole book. The image is striking, the white bones and the black night. This contrast is repeated further on: 'la noche sin vendas'; again, the contrast between the black night and the white bandages. Both are concepts that relate to injuries or death. The poem suggests the context of injury: 'entreabrir los huesos', 'aliardidas' (which sounds like 'alaridos'), 'sosoplos' (short breaths), 'enllagada', 'vendas', 'yesos', 'herido', 'sangres', 'muleta'. Words like 'entreabrir', 'enllagada', 'vendas' are figures of interpenetration. For example, the night is not completely opening up the bones. That is, the night is not fully exposing the inside of the bones. This would mean that the bones would lose their interiority because it would become completely exposed. The word used is 'entreabriendo'; opening the bones just enough to have access to their interior but not enough to expose it completely. The image goes right to the marrow. The bones are at the centre of the body, protected by the flesh, and in the poem the night is opening them up in order to expose their core to the questioning silence of death, to the questioning presence of the *there is*:

When the forms of the things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. In the night, where we are driven to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer *this* or *that*, there

is not 'something'. But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. [...] It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence, the voice of this silence is understood and frightens like the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of. *There is*, in general, without mattering what there is, without our being able to fix a substantive to this term. *There is* is an impersonal form, like it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential.¹⁴⁷

This presence closes the poem in an ending that is not so much the end of the poem but a gesture towards the space of the night: 'y es la noche/ y deserta'.¹⁴⁸ There are two possible readings of 'deserta': to desert something or to be deserted. I think that both readings apply to the poem since the night can itself be the one that abandons but it also can be the deserted, empty; that is, the night as a desert, the place of pure absence. This is why the night has become the totem, at one time the presence and the symbol. This ambiguity can be associated with the 'mitoformas' and the 'presencias *semimorfos*' of the poem. Both of these cases represent a lack of definite form. It is part of the displacement performed throughout the poem in the constant reference to 'others'. These others are not in the dialectic of us vis-à-vis them, but in an acknowledgement of place and absence: those that are not present here at this time. In the 'mitoformas otras' the reader finds again those 'others' like those mentioned in relation to 'trasfondos', and later on to 'las grislumbres otras', the 'idos pasos otros' and 'también otra escarbando'. These 'others' are references to that which is always in constant displacement, which cannot be pinned down, and of which the night is the only thing making itself present. This is emphasised by the

¹⁴⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 58.

¹⁴⁸ This poem is not the only one that has an open ending. This is also the case in poems like 'El pentotal a qué', 'Yolleo', and 'Plexilio'. What this indicates is a conscious gesture to the outside of the text and language, that is to silence, to what remains to be said or cannot be said.

forms that Girondo mentions in the poem which are not fully formed, for example the 'mitoformas' or the 'semi-morfás'. If we think of a myth as the form given by a culture of its origin or the origin of something valuable to them, then the 'mitoformas otras' would be a signal to a constant reshaping that would make the forms give an account of the origin always incomplete. The origin is not in question, but it is only acknowledged as a mystery. In 'Yolleo', a poem directed to a god-the-father figure, the origin is in the shape of the 'tatatodo':

eh vos
no me oyes
tatatodo
por qué tanto yollar
responde

y hasta cuándo (p. 246)

Divinity remains silent, and the poet waiting. As Bataille pointed out, 'la ausencia de Dios no es la clausura: es la apertura del infinito'.¹⁴⁹ The absence of myth about which Bataille is writing becomes a challenge because man can no longer rely on the metaphysical as the space of his origin. Man finds himself alone in the void left by the absence of God. The absence of God reveals the world to man: 'el hecho de que un universo sin mito sea un universo en ruinas—reducido a la nada de las cosas—al privarnos de ello equipara la privación con la revelación del universo'.¹⁵⁰ A sense of revelation *from* the things of this world becomes the cornerstone of some poems from *Persuasión de los días*, where there is a feeling of mystery behind the things of this world: 'este perro,/ cotidiano/ que demuestra el milagro,/ que me acerca al misterio...' ('Inagotable asombro', p. 197-198). Girondo is making reference to the mystery of

¹⁴⁹ Georges Bataille, 'La ausencia de mito', in *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura: ensayos 1944-1961*, trans. and intro. by Silvio Mattoni (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2004), pp. 77-78 (p. 77).

¹⁵⁰ Bataille, 'La ausencia de mito', p. 77.

existence, to the essential metaphysical question: why is there something instead of nothing? The dog, *this* dog, is unique and yet it is similar to 'los perros ya muertos,/ y a todos los perros que existen.' The particularity of a singular existence, the mystery behind each thing drives Girondo to express through his poetry his need to relate to individual things. For Girondo there is no genus, type or class but particular things in themselves and for themselves bound together in existence. This is what he recognises as what exists in the world, and this is the basis for his struggle as a poet. On the one hand, there is a sense of frustration based on his need for personal knowledge of the individual but which makes him feel that all he can truly know are surfaces. On the other, there is still the need for some sort of transcendent unity that would grant meaning to existence binding it together. Girondo's poetry is not meant to disrupt this balance because this is the way in which he experiences the world. On the contrary, in his final book Girondo creates a space where those contraries can co-exist: 'en sus poemas Girondo despolariza conceptos binarios como por ejemplo el del alma por un lado y el cuerpo por otro'.¹⁵¹ In the poem 'Por vocación de dado' (p. 234)—in a clear homage to *Un coup de dés*—we find the lines: 'masdarme/ hasta el último dengue/ y entorpecer la nada'. His own presence is what can disrupt nothingness. This is almost a sacrifice, to give himself up for the struggle against nothingness.

According to Gianni Vattimo 'la negación de Dios o la admisión de su muerte no puede dar lugar hoy a una "reapropiación", por parte del hombre, de una esencia suya alienada en el ídolo de lo divino'.¹⁵² In other words, in the existential crisis triggered by modernity man can no longer account for his meaning from beyond the world. But as Bataille pointed out that absence of *the* transcended can however reveal the world. The relationship between the Avant-Garde and what is known as 'primitive art' can illuminate certain aspects of Girondo's thinking in

¹⁵¹ Rizzo-Vast, *El lugar de Girondo*, p. 136.

¹⁵² Vattimo, *El fin de la modernidad*, p. 33.

relation to this absence.¹⁵³ I think that 'primitive art' was seen as the connection between earth and man. It is this connection that partly infuses 'primitive art' with meaning to modern Western man since there were no external elements such as history that would give a cultural context to a particular 'primitive' work. As I will explain in the chapter on Concrete Poetry, for Octavio Paz modernity and technology stand between man and the world. Poetry, then, would present an opportunity to re-establish that connection. Gironde is interested, as later Eielson would be, in the pre-Columbian world and its inhabitants because they signify a direct link with the soil of the place where they live, a connection to the pre-history of a place. This is particularly clear in the case of Eielson. Raúl Antelo in his prologue to Gironde's complete works presents the poet's recovered fieldwork notes from an archaeological excavation.¹⁵⁴ Antelo explains that 'este interés no sólo por lo primitivo sino por lo arcaico como materiales a partir de los cuales abstraer la experiencia inmediata hizo que, después de *Interlunio*, Gironde llegara a emprender algunas experiencias arqueológicas.'¹⁵⁵ It is significant that Antelo contextualises these expeditions after *Interlunio* (1937) because this tale bears in its structure a movement from the city towards the countryside. Such movement signals a search for the presence of existence not in the cafés and museums of the city but in the earth, in the openness of the *pampas*. The conversation with the cow/mother in *Interlunio* represents a symbolic connection to the origin, both as the mother and as the earth (pp. 122-123).

This connection with the earth is also represented by the figure of a totem. A totem pole goes into the earth uniting the sky with the soil. In *Persuasión de los días* the poem 'Tótem' (p. 158) highlights, among other things, the totem as an object that performs such a union: 'bien plantado

¹⁵³ Adriana Armando y Guillermo Fantoni, 'El "primitivismo" martinfierrista: de Gironde a Xul Solar', in OC, pp. 475-489; Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch, eds., *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁴ Antelo, 'Estudio filológico preliminar', in OC, pp. xxvii-xc (pp. lxix-lxxx).

¹⁵⁵ Antelo, 'Estudio filológico preliminar', in OC, p.lxxi.

en la tierra,/ las nubes se enmarañan en sus duros cabellos.' In this poem the totem is a tree, but as the poet himself says: 'aunque vive tan alto que ignora mi existencia/ no quiero perturbarlo./ ¡Quién pudiera decirme si es un dios o un árbol!' This ending brings to mind what Baudelaire said about an African totem: 'it is perhaps the true God'.¹⁵⁶ And in *En la mas médula* we find 'Noche tótem'; where the totem is no longer a particular object, but the whole of night.

A totem marks a threshold; it encloses a sacred space, it separates what lies inside from what remains outside. According to Emile Durkheim: 'it is in relation with it [the totem], that things are classified as sacred or profane', and he concludes 'it is the very type of sacred thing'.¹⁵⁷ Gironde uses the figure of the totem to weave together several elements of existence and art meaningful to him: the presence of the object; the link to more 'primitive' societies and artistic practices, which in their turn represent a more direct association with existence; and the fact that the totem pole unites the earth and the sky, just as the language of the poem bridges different spaces together: 'lo que ocurre en el lenguaje originario—o, lo que es lo mismo en cierta medida, en el lenguaje de la poesía—es una colocación de la cosa en el juego del *Geviert*, la cuadratura de tierra y cielo, mortales y divinos'.¹⁵⁸ 'Noche tótem' becomes a symbol of this juncture.

Night erases differences, it reduces the importance of vision and enhances the senses of touch and hearing. In 'Noche tótem' the presence of night does not have connotations of kindness and protection, but rather a presence that relentlessly observes and questions: it is the 'párpados videntes'. Gironde, in a surrealist-type metaphor makes eyes of the eyelids themselves: always there looking inquisitively. Like the silence of the 'Tatatodo' they are there open, hunting the poet with no end in sight: 'hasta cuándo'. I do not see in the 'párpados videntes' a

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Flam and Deutch, *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915; repr. 1964), p. 119.

¹⁵⁸ Vattimo, *El fin de la modernidad*, p. 61.

metaphor of prophetic powers, meaning that could be assumed by the use of the word 'vidente', but rather one that speaks of a relentless watchfulness. As if the dark and silence of the night insistently questioned Gironde about existence, its meaning, its purpose. This is a reason why, I think, Gironde moves back and forth in a sort of dialectical movement between poems like 'Inagotable asombro' to 'Arena' (p. 134) from *Persuasión de los días*: 'Arena,/ y más arena,/ y nada más que arena'. This movement between exaltation for the things of this world to nihilistic void is also found in *En la masmédula*, for example in the poems 'Mi lumía' (p. 235) and 'El puro no' (p. 231). The eyelids of 'Noche tótem' with their questioning gaze can grind almost anything to dust, they are made of emery—a mineral used in mining and in the process of polishing stones. This constant questioning is emphasised by the lines 'herido interrogante' and 'escarbando lo incierto'. Night questions with its silence, but everything is uncertain, the forms are almost forms, there is not one answer. 'La noche sin vendas' could simply be an image of a cloudless night sky but it could also indicate the all encompassing night, the one that absorbs everything, the one we cannot see because we are in it, we are part of it and it is part of us. The night in this poem is present not as a scenario in which things happen; in this poem the night *happens*. It is not about night time, it is about space and presence, the space filled with the presence of the night: 'but when everything has disappeared in the night "everything has disappeared" appears. This is the *other* night. Night is the apparition.'¹⁵⁹ Night presents itself as an ungraspable and immaterial presence. This *other* night is sacred, insofar as the sacred is taken to be the presence of the *there is*: 'the impersonality of the sacred primitive religions [...] describes a world where nothing appears for the apparition of a God. Rather than to a God, the notion of the *there is* leads us to the absence of God, the absence of any being.'¹⁶⁰ The presence of

¹⁵⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans with intro by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 163.

¹⁶⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. with intro. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 61.

the mystery can only be through an anonymous apparition or as an approximation. The night as an all encompassing presence; a presence that is nevertheless an absence. For Jorge Schwartz the nocturne serves Gironde as a starting point for the subversion of the romantic *fin-de-siècle* model.¹⁶¹ As Schwartz points out, the night 'lejos de representar lo amoroso, lo seductor, lo misterioso o lo sensual, es vista por Gironde como "vigilia esteril",' and connects the nocturnes' continuous presence in his poetry as the indication of an increasing negation of the poet's subjectivity.¹⁶² One thing the nocturnes take on from the Romantic tradition is their sense of melancholia for that inaccessible mystery. This inaccessible mystery, perhaps because of its silence, has been linked here to an absence of God in the words of Bataille.

FARAI UN VERS DE DREIT NIEN.¹⁶³

At the beginning of this section I explored the significance of Segismundo and Hamlet in *En la mas médula*. There I concluded that Gironde created a link between certain characteristics that those characters represented and what he intended to express in his own book. This identification is based on the subject; Hamlet, Segismundo and Gironde as subjectivities that share certain aspects of their experience of existence. However, subjectivity as a unity was taken for granted since it is the basis for introspection, another shared characteristic between them. But as we will see this unity was also questioned by the poet, leaving the poem as the only certainty, the only mark of presence.

In the poem 8 of *Espantapájaros* Gironde writes: 'yo no tengo una personalidad; yo soy un cocktail, un conglomerado, una manifestación de personalidades' (p. 86). There is a constant undercurrent in his poetry about the multiplicity of his self. This, however, should not be thought

¹⁶¹ Schwartz, 'Poesía inédita: la retaguardia poética en "dos nocturnos" y "Campo nuestro" de Oliverio Gironde', in *OC*, pp. 417-442 (p. 419).

¹⁶² Schwartz, 'Poesía inédita', pp. 419-420.

¹⁶³ Guilhem de Peitieu, 'Farai un vers de dreit nien', in *Poesía de Trovadores, Trouvères, Minnesinger de principios del siglo XII a fines del siglo XIII*, ed. and trans. by Carlos Alvar (Madrid: Alianza, 1999), pp. 80-82 (p. 80).

along the lines of Pessoa's heteronyms, since as far as I am able to ascertain Gironde did not create other particular personae to express a particular poetics.¹⁶⁴ I believe it is closer to Rimbaud's sentence 'Je est un autre', because it questions the very notion of self.¹⁶⁵ Gironde writes in the first of the nine 'Nocturnos' of *Persuasión de los días*:

No soy yo quien escucha
ese trote llovido que atraviesa mis venas.

No soy yo quien se pasa la lengua entre los labios,
al sentir que la boca se me llena de arena.

No soy yo quien espera,
enredado en mis nervios

[...]

No soy yo quien escribe estas palabras huérfanas. (p. 146)

From the outset this poem is indicating a sense of discontinuity between the self and the body. Throughout the poem there is an alienation between the 'yo' and parts of the body such as 'venas', 'labios' and 'nervios'. Gironde does not deny that the body is him or, rather, his. He explicitly writes 'mis venas' and 'mis nervios' but there remains a gap between his body and his 'yo'. The reader gets a more complex picture with the last line since this indicates that it is not he who is writing, cancelling the association between the inner self and its expression through poetry. It is probably because of this alienation between the 'yo' and the body as agent in the world, and who, in this sense, is physically

¹⁶⁴ Fernando Pessoa, 'Toward Explaining Heteronymy', trans. by Jonathan Griffin, in *The Poet's Work: 29 Poets on the Origins and Practice of Their Art*, ed. by Reginald Gibbons (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 5-15.

¹⁶⁵ Arthur Rimbaud, 'À Georges Izambard, 13 of May 1871', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Rolland de Renéville and Jules Mouquet (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 267-268 (p. 268).

A different expression of this alienation is the exile of the experiencing ego is the subject of the poem 'Plexilio' (p. 249) of *En la masmédula*. This is the only poem in that book to use in its entirety the typographical disposition of the poem on the page to complete the idea.¹⁶⁶ It is as if the staggering of the words on the page would suggest visually the slow dissolution of the ego:

ido

¹⁶⁶ There is a second poem with these characteristics which is the one that opens the book *Espantapájaros*, 'Yo no sé nada' (p. 77).

the precariousness of forms. The prefix of the title '*Plexilio*' acoustically suggests 'pleno', which would be in a sense paradoxical since 'pleno' is related to plenitude and fulfilment. But it could also mean in full, as in unambiguous. The phrase 'en pleno exilio' would in this sense mean 'at the centre of exile'. The ego is dissolving into space, the 'plespacio'. The final dissolution, the total disintegration of the ego is suggested by the last reference to space, the 'no espacio', and the subsequent word 'ido'. Whatever there was, it is now gone completely even from space itself. Gironde is suggesting the dissolution of the ego into nothingness.¹⁶⁷

Nothingness as a concept in Gironde directly responds to its opposite, existence and presence. In this sense, the nothingness into which the ego from '*Plexilio*' disintegrates is opposite to the sacrifice with which he concludes 'Por vocación de dado': 'y redarme y masdarme/ hasta el ultimo dengue/ y entorpecer la nada' (p. 234). In the end of this poem Gironde is setting himself up as a disruption of nothingness. He is not presuming to stop this nothingness but just to be, as a being that exists, in its way. Gironde is constantly threading between opposites, nothingness and presence, as in the case of Ophelia and Lazarus. The concept of nothingness is also found in Jorge Eduardo Eielson but with different localisations, if we can speak of a localisation of something that is not. For Gironde nothingness has to do with what is directly beyond his own presence, this is why he can disrupt it simply by being there. In Eielson nothingness is far away, beyond the whole world. Two poems testify to this '*Variaciones sobre un tema de Jorge Guillén*' (p. 116) from *Tema y variaciones*:

nada casi nada: cielo
aletazos de nada
en la nada: vuelo

¹⁶⁷ A similar dissolution is suggested by the last canto of *Altazor* where language is deconstructed into apparently meaningless sounds, Vicente Huidobro, '*Altazor*', in *Obra poética*, pp. 719-822 (pp. 807-808).

y el cielo que se vuelve suelo

todo casi todo: suelo

aletazos de todo

en todo: nado

y el suelo que se vuelve cielo

nada casi nada: suelo

todo casi todo: cielo

And poem number '9' (p. 183) from *Mutatis mutandis*:

nada

sino una masa clara

de millones y millones de kilos

de plomo de plata de nada

vacío y peso y vacío nuevamente

nada de plomo plomo en la nada

nada de plata plata en la nada

nada de nada nada en la nada

nada

sino la luna la nada

y la nada nuevamente

In both poems nothingness is impersonal, it remains beyond the world in which the poet exists. Nothingness in these poems by Eielson comprehends massive phenomena such as the sky. That is, nothingness is far away, it does not threaten his own personal existence but it is something one has to travel to in order to get to it: 'y un callejón de ceniza/ de la cocina a la nada?' ('Albergo del sole I', p. 160). For Gironde nothingness lies just beyond the limit of his own skin, it is within the

space he inhabits and it is constantly threatening his existence. And it is because of this that nothingness has ambiguous connotations for him it is personal. On the one hand it is something that must be disrupted, something against which the existence and presence of the poet—or any other being that exists—should be sustained like a breakwater: it does not stop the tide but it slows it down and minimises the impact. On the other, nothingness is also the possibility of greater freedom, the dissolution not of his existence but of the cultural and historical fetters that bind him to a set of a priori structures and laws. Into this last option enters the question of a multiplicity of selves as opposed to the normative single and defined identity. We read in the poem 'Cansancio' (pp. 162-163) from *Persuasión*:

Cansado
de usar un solo brazo
veinte dedos
no sé cuántas palabras
no sé cuantos recuerdos
[...]

Cansado
por carecer de antenas,
de un ojo en cada homóplato
y de una cola auténtica
[...]

Cansado,
sobre todo,
de estar siempre conmigo,
de hallarme cada día,
cuando termina el sueño,

allí, donde me encuentre,
con las mismas narices
y con las mismas piernas;
como si no deseara
esperar la rompiente con un cutis de playa,
ofrecer al rocío, dos senos de magnolia,
acariciar la tierra con un vientre de oruga,
y vivir, unos meses, adentro de una piedra.

This poem stresses his anxiety insofar as this term can be related to a feeling of tightness, of being enclosed in a narrow space. However, this is not about just being uncomfortable in his own body. It is also about the missing possibilities of experiencing life in different ways, *from* different bodies. 'Cansancio' marks a sharp difference between his physical reality 'cansado/... de hallarme cada día,/ allí, donde me encuentre' and the freedom provided by his desire and mind. This idea is taken to the extreme in 'Plexilio' where the ego is completely dissolved. And yet the implications of 'Plexilio' are also ambiguous since the dissolution of the ego might open an unlimited space of possibilities albeit with no continuous experiencing agent. This experiencing agent, in other words the subject as a unity, is what is called into question by Girondo's poetry. The contrast between freedom and constraint in a subjective unity is expressed in another poem from *Persuasión de los días*, 'Restringido propósito' (p. 175):

Demasiado corpóreo,
limitado,
compacto.

Tendré que abrir los poros
y disgregarme un poco.

No digo demasiado.

The sense of constraint is physical. This poem is also connected with 'Plexilio', particularly with the verb 'disgregarme' which in the poem of *En la masmédula* becomes the theme of the poem. Physical limitations can be recognised in other aspects of his poetry such as the expressed need for a true communion with others. We experience the world through our bodies. They are the barrier that separates us from others but they are also what unite us to them. Our physical existence is our space in the world; it is our presence. The gestures of our bodies reveal the inner world of our being and it is through these gestures that we can express and communicate with others: 'el gesto y la fisonomía. Por lo mismo que son impremeditados, dejan escapar noticias del secreto profundo y normalmente lo reflejan con exactitud.'¹⁶⁸ But man lives alone and in this existential condition seeks communion with others and with his world, as Camus wrote 'I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity.'¹⁶⁹ Something similar to this desire for unity is identified in the work of Gironde by different critics. Enrique Molina and Adriana Rodríguez refer to this as 'una especie de solidaridad universal'.¹⁷⁰ Ironically, it is the very consciousness that desires this unity what in fact enables the perceived separation.¹⁷¹ The physical limitation experienced by the subject is bypassed by the multiplication of personalities which allow the poet's mind to roam free and experience the world from different points of view. However, this poses a certain risk which Gironde seems to acknowledge retrospectively: to lose the original experiencing self. Critics like Francine Masiello have

¹⁶⁸ José Ortega y Gasset, 'La elección en amor', in *Obras completas*, 11 vols. (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1947), V, pp. 591-620 (p. 594).

¹⁶⁹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. by Austin O'Brien (London: Hamish Mamilton, 1965), p. 45.

¹⁷⁰ Molina, 'Hacia el fuego central', in *Obras*, pp. 9-48 (p.22.); Adriana Rodríguez Pérsico refers to this solidarity in 'Gironde o el triunfo de una ética posagónica', in *OC*, pp. 379-403 (p. 379).

¹⁷¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. by Bernard Wall, intro. by Sir Julian Huxley (New York: Collins, 1959; London: Readers Union, 1960), pp. 227-230.

assumed a same constant subject acting as witness throughout Girondo's poetic production.¹⁷² Yet it is precisely the category of the subject that is under constant scrutiny throughout his work, particularly in the later stages. I do agree that up to *Interlunio* Girondo's poetry is based on a mainly visual experience of the world. But it is in *Interlunio* that Girondo openly questions his own relationship with reality and deems it superficial; that is, it experiences and knows only exteriorities. On the other hand, and as Masiello herself remarks, and as I have shown in the first section of this chapter, in *En la masmédula* it is the concrete aspect of sound which becomes the main impulse of the poems.¹⁷³ This signals a shift towards a balance between sight and the more internal and primary sense of hearing. The interiority of the sense of sound will emphasise the extent to which his prior experience of the world was external. What this leads to, I believe, are the poems in which he expresses a need to renounce his 'limiting humanity'. In two poems Girondo speaks of his zoological ancestry, one is 'Tantan yo' (p. 256): 'posyo del mico ancestro semirefluido en vilo ya lívido de líbido'; and in 'Porque me cree su perro' (p. 257) we find the following:

sin fin ni sino o causa o pauta o pausa me sacaré yo el lastre que no
 lastra
 por no saber a piedra
 por no saber saber
 ni saber no saber
 los decesos del seso y sus desechos me sacaré yo de pie
 junto con tanta sombra sórdida que sobra de cuanto fue y no fue
 o fue fue
 y no se fue
 aunque retorne al árbol del primo primo simio me sacaré yo sin tino la
 maraña

¹⁷² Masiello, 'Naturaleza y artificio', p. 412.

¹⁷³ Masiello, 'Naturaleza y artificio', p. 412.

demasiadísimo humana

This poem speaks of the decontamination of the place where experience happens. The poem begins: 'y sacaréme la niebla/ el turbio zumo oscuro del traspienso'. However, this does not refer only to a clouding of the mind but of his whole being for he fed from what now stands blocking his perception:

y tragué yo en la sed

a trago tardo largo

lo hueco

lo plenamente hueco y que no es más que hueco

pero crece

The risk is here made manifest and clear, the hollow is now part of him, it is growing inside of him threatening his existence and it must be expelled. I will later analyse the fact that the hollow and nothingness are inside and outside of the poet. At the moment, I would like to conclude that within 'Porque me cree su perro' Gironde at least partly relates the limitations of his existence to his humanity, his feelings and thoughts, his doubts:

... me sacaré yo sin tino la maraña

demasiadísimo humana

y mil y miles vueltas y revueltas y contras y recontras

y sus colas

y sus entelequitas y emocioncitas nómadas

y más y más

de cuaje me sacaré el obtuso yo zurdo absurdo burdo

In the poem 'Cansancio' from *En la masmédula* there is another allusion to this frustration with the inadequacy of emotion and ideas: 'y de los instintivos perversitos/ y de las ideonas de putonas' (p. 263). It is the 'yo', the subject as a superimposed construction on existence that must be transcended. Jorge Eduardo Eielson also contrasts his humanity with the image of a primate. For both poets this image has different connotations but it is illuminating to see that both expressed a need to contrast their historic and cultural selves with a natural a-historical animal existence.¹⁷⁴ In the case of the concrete poet a similar action consisted in creating a poetry that went beyond individual subjectivities. This question of the decontamination of existence, or rather, this becoming aware of the subject as a cultural production is particularly important for Gironde's understanding of experience. I think that he demonstrates his anxiety about this question in the concern showed about only being able to relate to the surface of others, his inability to know beyond exteriorities. One way to understand Gironde's complex relationship with subjectivity is to interpret this element of his poetry from the point of view of Gianni Vattimo's analysis of Nietzsche's concept of the *Uebermensch*.¹⁷⁵ Vattimo's interpretation of the *Uebermensch* begins by clarifying that it is not possible to understand this concept correctly without acknowledging the problem of the subject as a backdrop.¹⁷⁶ Vattimo's analysis posits that the over-man is based not on the transcendence of subjectivity but on the conscious realisation of its origin as a product of the cultural tradition to which it belongs:

¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, the monkey in Gironde is not only a symbol of nature and naturalness, it can also be the image of a lack of consciousness and self-awareness, see, for example, the poem 'Maspleonismo' (p. 236).

¹⁷⁵ Gianni Vattimo, *Más allá del sujeto: Nietzsche, Heidegger y la hermenéutica*, trans. by Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Paidós, 1992), pp. 25-45. Aldo Pellegrini writes in a short essay that Gironde was familiar with the philosophy of Nietzsche, Aldo Pellegrini, 'Breve Biografía', in *Oliverio Gironde* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1964), pp. 11-16 (p. 12). I do not, however, mean to suggest that Gironde 'applied' Nietzsche's ideas to his own work but this is something that deserves further analysis.

¹⁷⁶ Vattimo, *Más allá del sujeto*, p. 26. Vattimo also explains that next to the problem of the subject is the problem of dialectic thought. However, for the present analysis is necessary to concentrate mainly on the exploration of the subject.

No se puede hablar de "cosas en sí" escribe Nietzsche [...] porque ninguna cosa se da si no es en referencia a un horizonte de sentido, que hace posible su darse. Si es así, deberemos decir que las cosas son obra del sujeto que las representa, las quiere, las experimenta. También el sujeto, sin embargo, es algo análogamente "producido", una "cosa" como todas las otras.¹⁷⁷

What comes out of this is a system of relations and interpretations of those relations from within a 'horizon of meaning'. The over-man still maintains a subject-based relationship with the world, however what has changed is the structure of those relations since there is no superior third term that would define them from beyond. With an absent third term—God or Being, for example—things as well as the subject acquire meaning through a process of interpretation:

El *ueber* del *Uebermensch* nietzscheano, pues, no alude a una superación de tipo dialéctico; ni se refiere ante todo al ejercicio de una voluntad de vida [...] está, en cambio, pensado sobre el modelo de la estructura característica, según Nietzsche, de la experiencia hermenéutica.¹⁷⁸

The conclusion that Vattimo draws from here is that interpretation is linked with becoming.¹⁷⁹ That is, things, subjects are in a constant state of becoming because they are constantly reshaped as well as their relationships by the hermeneutic process. For Vattimo this consciousness, which is the consciousness of modern man aware of the 'death of God' does not bring peace of mind or of the spirit but rather an hubris, 'una especie de violencia en relación a sí mismo y a las cosas.'¹⁸⁰ This hubris is not necessarily a physical violence but rather the violence we do to things

¹⁷⁷ Vattimo, *Más allá del sujeto*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁸ Vattimo, *Más allá del sujeto*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁹ Vattimo, *Más allá del sujeto*, p. 37.

¹⁸⁰ Vattimo, *Más allá del sujeto*, p. 33.

through our interpretations, the imposition of our reason upon them. Thus, the synthesis of Vattimo's analysis and Girondo's lines 'me sacaré yo sin tino la maraña/ demasiadísimo humana' would be as follows: this 'desenmarañamiento' is a becoming aware that subjectivity, his subjectivity, is a product. But subjectivity is not disregarded but assumed as such, this is why, I think, he multiplies it creating different 'yoes'. Following Vattimo's model we would encounter interpretation in Girondo as the movement from the affirmation of his presence, for example in 'entorpecer la nada' in 'Por vocación de dado'; as well as his multiple yoes such as in 'Aridandantemente' or 'Tantan yo'; and the annihilation of that subjectivity in words such as 'egofluido' from 'Plexilio'.¹⁸¹ There is no order in these interpretations of the subject, but rather an assumed contradiction. This consciousness, and this is the last point I will draw from Vattimo's analysis, would be the hubris as a certain type of violence which becomes concrete in the language of *En la masmédula*: 'y el mismo pis vertido es un perverso feto' ('Maspleonasma', p. 236) or 'tras la yerta penumbra acribillada por sus arpones' ('Canes más que finales', p. 223). This violence is also perceptible in the multiplication of selves as in the poem 'Aridandantemente' (p. 224):

Sigo
solo
me sigo
[...]
mientras sigo y me sigo
y me recontrasigo
de un extremo a otro estero
aridandantemente
sin estar ya conmigo ni ser un otro otro

¹⁸¹ There is here an untapped field in the work of Girondo, the concept of flux.

What this multiplication shows is the risk of losing the 'original self' among the series of other selves. With this possible confusion a question about the originality of experience is opened. The poem generates a kind of vertigo from the possibility of not being able to experience *in* the original self. The confusion lies in that the poem is not describing a true multiplicity where every new self would be identical to all others, were the question for the original would therefore be meaningless. In the poem there is a sense of loss, of being left in the void between the different selves: 'sin estar ya conmigo ni ser un otro otro'. What or who is feeling this loss is precisely who utters that 'sin estar ya'. Separated from the voice speaking the poem are the 'conmigo' and the 'otro'. This separation is emphasised by the barren landscape in words like 'lodo baldío' and 'estero', for example. This in its turn is mirrored by a mental landscape of infertility: 'neuroyertos rumbos'. The word 'yerto' is sometimes related to the stiffness of a corpse. In this case the image created is of brittleness, and it can be linked to the word 'escleropsiquis' from 'Por vocación de dado'. The image suggested by 'neuroyertos rumbos' can also indicate a rigid mental process, contrary to what the poet's imagination needs to be. The images of barrenness and dryness and brittleness are what the title 'Aridandantemente' also suggests. If we break this word into its components we find arid(o)-andante-mente (both the adverb ending and mind). What we have is a simultaneously external and internal image of someone slowly walking though an arid landscape. It is both internal and external because this metaphor can be applied to what is happening in the mind of the poet but also in the way he sees the world. This poem then is a microcosm of the interplay between the interior and the exterior which *En la mas médula* wants to bridge.

According to Susanne K. Langer in a poem 'comment itself when used as a poetic element is not the poet's comment, but the imaginary speaker's who makes it in the poem. His name may simply be "I"; but

that again is a part of the poetic creation.¹⁸² I am not contesting the accuracy of this statement. It is indeed applicable to certain modern poets such as Juan Ramón Jiménez or Ezra Pound; although Langer's examples tend to avoid Avant-Garde or even modern poetry and concentrate on poets like Dante, Arnold, and Keats. However, it cannot be said that all modern or avant-garde poets use this device in that particular way. Langer's statement taken as part of a theory of modern poetry seems to generalise on an artistic practice that thrives on particular perspectives, as well as to add an ironic element to certain practices that do not intend to be necessarily so. What I meant to do by quoting this fragment is to contrast it with the problem of the subject/ego in Gironde. I think it would be a misreading to place this aspect of Gironde's poetics in Langer's light because he is clearly addressing this issue of the subject in an open and direct way that falls out of the scheme of the literary device to which Langer calls attention. This issue is a lot more personal to him as a poet and as an individual that exists in the world; that is, it is not only a crafter's device but a reflexion upon reality and existence. This is evident in the return to the issue itself to an almost obsessive degree. In poems like 'Tantan yo' of *En la masmédula*, the 'I' does not function as the driving energy of the poem but it is there rather as a meditation about the limitations of the 'yo' itself as a term, a concept and an image:

Con mi yo
y mil y un yo y un yo
con mi yo en mí
yo mínimo

The poem ponders the localisation of the I 'con mi yo en mí' that ultimately points to the existence of an agent who experiences itself and

¹⁸² Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art: 10 Philosophical Lectures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 122.

the world but that cannot be solely understood as an 'I' since it also experiences this element as external to itself. This seems as first to concur with Langer's observation since the 'I' would be a construction that can be analysed, and in part it does. The I of which Girondo is writing is not only the poetical ego that carries the poem but the agent that experiences the world stemming from a cultural and historical tradition that places an invariable ego at the centre of experience: 'El *cogito* de Descartes expresa la vivencia de una evidencia firme: el yo se sabe, en el acto de pensar, como el punto fijo, a partir del cual se deja someter el universo a la intervención del hombre.'¹⁸³ It is this *cogito* that we earlier saw was the centre of Nietzsche's criticism of the subject. It is precisely that 'punto fijo' what Girondo in 'Tantan yo' is paradoxically addressing, since in the poem the existence and presence of the 'yo' is reaffirmed in the multiplications but at the same time it questions the validity of its constancy and its reality in the face of different other 'yoes'.

In contrast to the multiplication of 'yoes' in 'Tantan yo' the reader finds 'El uno nones' (p. 228). The very title of this poem exemplifies the ambiguities expressed by Girondo about the existence of a single agent of consciousness, the I. The title of this poem plays with the ambiguity of odd and even numbers, the one is an odd number. But it can also be read as 'the one it is not', if we break up the word 'nones' into two 'non' and 'es'. This sense is reiterated by the first line of the poem proper: 'el uno total menos'. It is less than one, 'el uno yo subánima'. As we progress through the reading of this poem we come to understand that what makes the one less than one is its isolation 'el uno solo en uno'. That inescapable that forms part of the human condition:

El yo que realiza la experiencia de no poseer el propio pensamiento
como una pertenencia suya, que sus condiciones se hallan más
bien en el lenguaje, es decir, en un afuera, pierde la autocerteza

¹⁸³ Christa Bürger and Peter Bürger, *La desaparición del sujeto: Una historia de la subjetividad de Montaigne a Blanchot*, trans. by Agustín González Ruiz (Madrid: Akal, 2001), p. 290.

del yo cartesiano. No puede fundamentar ya la certeza de su existencia en la presencialidad de su pensamiento, pues éste no lo vivencia como movimiento puramente interior, sino como estar atraído por un afuera que no es capaz de separar de sí.¹⁸⁴

The disappearance of the ego in 'Plexilio' was announced because the ego itself was considered false: 'preseudo', 'subcero', 'flujo fatuo'. The ego is deceptive because it is almost something. In this particular sense the absence of ego would bring about the joy of being closer to a truthful existence.¹⁸⁵

Girondo in *En la masmédula* attacks simultaneously the presuppositions about subjectivity and the relationship between language and experience: 'reality has to be transformed by the imagination before it is truly perceived,' writes Hamburger in his study.¹⁸⁶ I do not fully agree with this, since contemplation does not require imagination in order to perceive the world. However, for Girondo I think that this is true since in not being able to perceive reality directly and without filters—cultural, historical, personal, etc.—there is a feeling of melancholia for what could be perceived, and this possibility is what moves Girondo. This transformation seems to be, in *En la masmédula*, a cleansing process expected to purge the experience of anything *not* real. Taking this cleansing to its limits can only lead to an absolute negation:

El no
el no inóvulo
el no nonato
el noo
el no poslodocosmos de impuros ceros noes que noan noan noan
y nooan

¹⁸⁴ Christa Bürger and Peter Bürger, *La desaparición del sujeto*, p. 289.

¹⁸⁵ Bataille, 'La ausencia de mito', p. 77.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modernist Poetry since Baudelaire* (London: Anvil, 1996), p. 104.

y plurimono moan al borbo amorfo noo
no démono
no deo
sin son sin sexo ni órbita
el yerto inóseo noo en unisolo amódulo
sin poros ya sin nódulo ni yo ni fosa ni hoyo
el marco no ni polvo
el no más nada todo
el puro no
sin no (p. 231)

The 'no' as a thing can only be surpassed by its true self which in the poem is present only through its negation in language: 'sin no'. This poem marks the extreme independence of language from a referent. Paradoxically it is also pure affirmation, since by asserting the impossibility of its subject—negation—it is asserting itself as the agent of assertion of presence. In the denial of its subject it is asserting its own existence, and its own reason for existing. Language by the end of this poem seems to float free from representation and reference, however it is tied to the affirmation of presence, to the affirmation of the voice: the voice of the poem and the voice of the reader. This 'pure no' is the affirmation of presence in the midst of the void. This void is the possibility of not being, the absence of 'no', insofar as this 'no' is language.

Girondo in this poem points toward an end of representation, leaving the poem, its language, to present itself momentarily before the reader realises that the point of the poem lies outside. An outside not in the sense of the reality lived by humans and of which poems speak about, nor a simple outside as an opposite of an inside; an outside of the world, absolute, an essential nothingness on which the very reality of

man is sustained: the 'plexilio'.¹⁸⁷ Sergio Givone, writing about Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Frau am Fenster* of 1822 (fig. 1), concludes that in this particular painting 'el objeto de la representación es lo irrepresentable, y es precisamente la representación de esta imposibilidad de representar la que difunde en el cuadro un aire de profunda melancolía'.¹⁸⁸ This is not only relevant since the poem 'El puro no' marks an end to representation, but behind Givone's reflection about the link between this and melancholia, this poem becomes pre-eminent as a linguistic distilment of a feeling—melancholia—that has been present in Girondo's writing since the beginning. In *Veinte poemas* we read: 'luces trasnochadas que al apagarse nos dejan todavía más solos.' (p. 10). Although this feeling is constant throughout his production, it rises to prominence in *Interlunio* and in *En la masmédula* it presents itself in the multiple images of abysses and emptiness. But there is another instance where this feeling becomes evident, the necessity to be part of the other as if in the connection the mysteries and questions of and about existence would be resolved; or rather, they would become unnecessary.

It is relevant at this point to re-visit an image of transition discussed briefly in relation to the image of Ophelia, that of the guest. The figure of the guest in *En la masmédula* is not anyone in particular, but rather just the image of someone who is temporarily lodging somewhere that is not his or her own place. Yet the image of the guest in this book is one of absence, it is not the guest who is here but the guest who is not there: 'su más desierto huésped' (p. 247). This image of the guest is paired with death and dreams. Dreams, images and ideas as fleeting spectres, as simulacrum: 'huéspedes del macrobarro grávido de

¹⁸⁷ A case of a poet that invites the reader to be conscious of the outside of the poem is that of the Chilean Nicanor Parra, about this William Rowe explain that 'un principio central de la antipoesía: que lo importante es lo que está fuera del poema', 'Hacia el poema como ameba: *Poemas y antipoemas* de Nicanor Parra', in *Hacia una poética radical: ensayos de hermenéutica cultural* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo; Lima: Mosca Azul, 1996), pp. 145-171 (p. 160).

¹⁸⁸ Sergio Givone, *Historia de la nada*, trans. by Alejo González and Demian Orosz (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2001), p. 125.

muerte' (p. 250), 'cuartos de/huéspedes difuntos trasvestidos de soplo' (p. 232), 'más de un muerto huésped rondando la infraniebla' (p. 233), 'todo huésped sueño' (p. 236), 'trasueños los huéspedes' (p. 238). This sepulchral image emphasises the empty rooms and houses that hold many secrets, the 'casa cábala' of 'Rada anímica'. The guest as an image of transitivity cannot but increase the feeling of incompleteness—there is a troubling intimacy in this figure of the guest. This absence, or fleeting quasi-presence, points full circle to the impossibility of representation. The guest as a ghost-like figure is not meant to be seen but heard about as someone who has just departed, leaving behind only absence and emptiness:

La melancolía caracteriza el sentir de quien, experto en la vanidad y en la nulidad de las cosas humanas, extiende su mirada sobre el vacío universal y allí se deja seducir, desesperado no solo de las *operaciones* del hombre sino también y sobre todo de la redención. Melancolía pues como *desesperatio Dei*. Pero también, sucesivamente, como verdadera fijación alucinatoria, como renuncia a cualquier punto de vista sobre el mundo que no sea aquel que ve la nada y exclusivamente la nada.¹⁸⁹

The final 'no' of 'El puro no' is not the linguistic and graphic final 'no' of the poem. The 'sin no' of the poem indicates that the textual no is but something to shed in order to reach what lies behind, albeit it can only be present in language; it is its track. Therefore, since the 'sin no' indicates a detachment from its referent, we face here the image of language by itself as the trace that remains from the experience. We can infer that since the experience is the final denial of language what we face in this poem is not something beyond the poem but rather the poem

¹⁸⁹ Givone, *Historia de la nada*, p. 132.

itself, alone as an object in the world. What remains is language, on the page and in our reading experience.

'El puro no' denies everything. A total denial that paradoxically affirms the language used to announce, to present it. This total denial affirms something essential and primordial, nothingness. Denial is understood as that which is 'expuesto y negado al mismo tiempo, por lo tanto presupuesto, dejado allí, colocado en una dimension de olvido'.¹⁹⁰ The subject who speaks, and the world behind that subject are denied; language is denied. Yet this pure negation can only be presented through the language of the poem that denies it. It is negation or language that communicates itself thus: 'ceros noes que noan noan noan/ y nooan'. The 'nos' are action, the action of language; it its affirmation in the world; a being-there-in-the-world-as-nos. The double image of absence, the zero and 'no' leave nothing but language to stand on its own facing darkness, facing silence. These 'nos' that 'noan' are expressing themselves just as the owl expresses itself by the very act of existing-in-the-world, by doing and *being* what it is they are, i.e. with its gestures and sounds. These 'nos' are like things, quasi-objects that express themselves, and thus affirm their existence in the way that a person who commits suicide affirms his or her self in that final decision. Giorgio Agamben in *Language and Death* transcribes a riddle from the Middle Ages in which the problem of nothingness and language is discussed:

ALBINUS: What is and yet is not?

PIPPINUS: Nothing.

A: How can it be and not be?

P: It is in name and it is not in substance.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Givone, *Historia de la nada*, p. 13.

¹⁹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt, *Theory and History of Literature*, 78 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 73.

To *be* in name is still is a category of being, for Agamben this does not mean that language has become 'a simple thing among others, because, as a pure name and pure voice, it now simply indicates itself.'¹⁹² That is it points back to its own existence. This would mean that language has become the place of the poem indicating that the voice is triumphant over silence. Existence and language can be surrounded and even inhabited by dark meaninglessness; however there is still something that drives Gironde to continue to live and to write. It is not very clear what that 'something' is, the reader finds this in 'El pentotal a qué':

el "to be" a qué
 o el "not to be" a qué
 [...]
 el ascopez paqué
 cualquier a qué cualquiera
 el pluriaqué
 a qué
 el pentotal a qué
 a qué

a qué

a qué

y sin embargo (pp. 229-
 230)

We encounter here Hamlet once more, now as the embodiment of the essential metaphysical question; however Gironde is not trying to answer it, and he is asking about the consequence of both—to be, or not to be. This is another figure of denial, however the closing or rather absence of ending in this poem gestures to the poet's decision to exist: 'y sin embargo'. This 'sin embargo' opens the field—of the poem and of

¹⁹² Agamben, *Language and Death*, p. 73.

existence—to the possibilities of the future. It is not a reason to do something concrete, it is a decision beyond logic to continue, to carry on despite adverse circumstances: 'what is represented by the major existential characteristic of decision, or by the decided character of existence, or again by the fact that existence is, as such, the *decision of existence*.'¹⁹³

In this second section I have moved through three different areas pertaining to the idea, developed from the first section, of interconnectedness. One of the conclusions of the first section of this chapter was that the result of *En la mas médula*'s structure evoked a spatial form. This spatial form simulated a presence in the world which would, as a result, create a connection with the internal space of the author and the external space of the world. From this I have demonstrated that the idea of interconnectedness is, in fact, very much present in *En la mas médula*. And therefore, the idea that this book is solely self-reflexive is wrong. This sought interconnectedness is rather an expansive gesture that seeks to open spaces of communication rather than closing them with the presentation of a façade.

Oliverio Gironde explored the limitations of poetic form through an innovative use of language which allowed him to produce a complex work that signalled to the reader the collapse of spatial categories. *En la mas médula* opened up the possibilities about the use of multiple dimensions in the work of literature. But it ultimately it invites the reader to question the place of the work, its reality and its existence. For it is only through an active reading that the poem will fully exist.

¹⁹³ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Decision of Existence', in *The Birth of Presence*, trans by Brian Holmes and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 82-109 (p. 83).

MATERIAL PRESENCE IN THE WORK OF
JORGE EDUARDO EIELSON

Jorge Eduardo Eielson's artistic search expands in different directions. He is as much an accomplished novelist and poet as conceptual artist and painter. The different media that he used are intrinsically connected: 'en Eielson los reinos se trastocan, se contaminan unos a otros; conviven.'¹⁹⁴ This is the reason why in the present analysis I have moved beyond Eielson's written poems, although I begin from them. The relationship between the various facets of his work is not hierarchical. I do not think that the reader of Eielson's work should consider one more important than the others. It is possible to concentrate solely on one of these aspects but the price would be his vision, that intrinsic element that unites all of his work. I believe that there is in Eielson—and this is what unites him with Gironde and Concrete poetry—an impulse to present, to make evident the existence of the work of art. This responds to a necessity to ponder the mystery of existence through the passing of time. We can see that for Eielson the work is a mark of existence. His efforts to ponder this issue of presence through different media are what I aim to elucidate in the present chapter.

In the present chapter I will move between the different media connecting them with images and concepts of textiles, the body and spatial localisation. All of which connect with the concept of presence. Through these the idea that I wish to explore is the different ways in which Eielson sought to make existence evident without denying its

¹⁹⁴ Gabriel Bernal Granados, 'Eielson Nudos', in *En medio de dos eternidades: ensayos sobre literatura* (Mexico City: Magenta, 2007), pp. 129- 133 (p. 133).

mysterious, ineffable elements. Through his efforts Eielson underlines the existence of the limit between what can be seen and what remains unseen.

The present chapter is divided into five sections. The first one deals with clothing and textiles and the relationship these create with the exteriority of the world. The second section deals with nudity and the concepts of interiority and exteriority. The third section deals with the skin and its relationship and interaction with the environment. The fourth section deals with the interiority of the body. And the last section deals with the concepts of reading and viewing. As with the work of Eielson the subjects of these sections are not isolated. I have tried to keep the elements clearly separated as much as possible but without jeopardising the reader's possibilities to appreciate their intrinsic connection.

1. Textiles

The meaning of textiles and clothing for Jorge Eduardo Eielson has been well documented by critics and extensively discussed by Eielson himself.¹⁹⁵ In the long conversation with Martha Canfield published in Mexico City as *El diálogo infinito* Eielson recounts the emergence of textiles in his visual work: '[las prendas de vestir] partieron de los "paisajes infinitos de la costa del Perú", es decir de la arena misma, algo así como si hubieran sido desenterradas como restos arqueológicos.'¹⁹⁶ In fact, the image just described is the subject of *Camisa quemada* (fig. 2). The shirt becomes the limit between the sand and the blue paint that unites and keeps them apart. The shirt seems to be in the middle of

¹⁹⁵ Emilio Tarazona, 'La poética visual de Jorge Eielson', in *Nu/do*, pp. 257-258; Luis Rebaza Soraluz, *La construcción de un artista peruano contemporáneo: poética e identidad nacional* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2000), pp. 215-238; Rebaza Soraluz 'Construcciones de luz y de espacio e instrumentos y materiales precarios: poesía y plástica de Jorge Eduardo Eielson', this essay was sent to me by the author and will be published in 2007. These are some of the texts where Eielson's opinion about textiles can be found: 'El paisaje infinito de la costa del Perú', in *Nu/do*, pp. 267-268; *El diálogo infinito (una conversación con Martha L. Canfield)* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995), pp. 37-39; Jorge Eduardo Eielson, 'Luz y transparencia en los tejidos del antiguo Perú', in *Nu/do*, pp. 317-321.

¹⁹⁶ Eielson, *El diálogo infinito*, p. 37; Luis Felipe Fabre, 'Retomando los hilos', in *Espéculo: revista de estudios literarios de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, 28 (2004) <<http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero28/hilos.html>> [accessed 31 August 2006].

rising from the sand, as if the earth is either expelling or giving birth to it. The lower half of the shirt is hidden. The shirt in this particular piece is involved in the act of appearing, of becoming visible. The hidden lower half invites the imagination to question the *space*—what else could be hidden under the sand?—where the shirt is coming from:

La presencia de la materia—en su calidad de despojo—nos recuerda nuestra propia condición carnal y su ineludible epílogo. El desierto sigue siendo [...] cuna y tumba de nuestro acontecer histórico. Paracas en donde se urde el misterioso tejido de nuestro destino. Ninguna técnica artística aprendida habría podido capturar este *paisaje-cementerio* repleto de una cuantiosa vida subterránea.¹⁹⁷

In its structure *Camisa quemada* resembles that of the series *Paisajes infinitos de la costa del Perú*, some of them are horizontal with different media forming stratas (see figs. 3 & 4).¹⁹⁸ This structure evokes a continuing extension of the horizontal lines beyond the frame, to the point that it becomes an exploration of infinite landscapes that play dialectically with concepts of limits and infinity as it is possible to deduce from the relationships formed between the horizontals. Peru's geography had mythic implications in Eielson's thought, from its geological specificity, which allowed the preservation of ancient textiles, to the pre-Colombian cultures represented by archaeological remains:

Las prendas y restos semicubiertos, o semiexpuestos por arena de los cuadros del *Paisaje infinito* no sólo sugieren el afloramiento de contextos del pasado hacia el presente, debido al proceso circular

¹⁹⁷ Eielson, 'El paisaje infinito de la costa del Perú', in *Nu/do*, pp. 267-268 (p. 268).

¹⁹⁸ This series of abstract mixed media canvases, made with sand, paint, wood, organic matter, etc. Eielson began working on this series in 1957 and he expressed his intention of continuing working on it throughout his life as he regarded it as a constant journey: 'el "paisaje infinito" es también para el autor—y seguirá siendo hasta sus extremas consecuencias—una exploración que se prolongará sin cesar', in 'El paisaje infinito de la costa del Perú', in *Nu/do*, p. 268.

de enterramiento y desenterramiento que llevan a cabo las aguas y el viento, sino que también insinúan una operación de “rescate” arqueológico que reconstruye contextos culturales a partir de sus vestigios: cada cuadro matérico puede interpretarse como un fragmento del espacio-tiempo de la costa peruana traído a un aquí y ahora. Tal introspección casi arqueológica “en la memoria”, entendida como excavación metafórica en direcciones descendiente, interna y regresiva, tiene objetivos y ofrece resultados reconstructivos.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, it is not only the horizontal structure of the *Paisajes infinitos* that creates the meaning of the works, but rather the implied existence of a space under the sand, *in* the earth. I think that this structure can be transposed to the way in which the body and clothing relate to each other in the texts. There is a particular link with *Camisa quemada* in the connections between the emerging shirt and its surrounding spaces, and the way clothing in the text seems to form structures. Clothing and the body have a structure of stratas, where the clothes are the outermost one and the physical interiority of the body is the deepest physical one remaining the spiritual/psychological as the deepest unknown. This structure also forms or suggests the following: an *in between* space from one element to the next. That is, an interior existence that implies a relationship between the seen and the unseen.

Taking the image of the emerging shirt as a basic structure of simultaneously joining and keeping apart adjoining areas, we will see that in both novels—*El cuerpo de Giulia-no* and *Primera muerte de María*—clothing is used to delimit/blur the characters’ identities.²⁰⁰ Clothing operates as a limit between them. In *El cuerpo de Giulia-no*, Giulia’s dress and Giuliano’s clothes are exchanged in the narrator’s mind

¹⁹⁹ Luis Rebaza Soraluz, ‘Una escalera sostenida sobre la arena: la construcción poética escrita y no-escrita de Jorge Eduardo Eielson’, in Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Arte poética*, ed. and intro. by Luis Rebaza Soraluz (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2004), pp. 36-37.

²⁰⁰ Sergio Ramírez Franco, ‘Las novelas de J. E. Eielson’, in *Nu/do*, pp. 97-102 (pp. 100-101).

altering their identities. Clothing becomes the field *in between* them that opens this possibility:

¿Cómo sería Giuliano con tu Gran Traje de Seda, con tus cabellos rojos? ¿Cómo serías tú con su camisa, su vestido azul, sus zapatos lustrados? "Janus bifronte", Herma de dos cabezas. ¿Cuál de los dos me engañaba? ¿Tú con tu pobreza, tu incomprensible sonrisa, tu graciosa delgadez? ¿Giuliano con su gordura, sus millones, y sus fábricas? Idénticos los dos. Los mismos ojos verdes traidores. Las mismas ropas inútiles.²⁰¹

The clothes function as a catalyst in the narrator's mind. The clothes are a potential field where the individualities of the characters are erased. As in Federico García Lorca's play *El público*, Eielson depicts a world that does not seem to belong to world of day but rather to what lies hidden behind what we see during the day; also, like in Lorca's play, Eielson enables the characters' change through their clothing.²⁰²

In *Primera muerte de María*, the dress is the limit between María Magdalena and her stripper alter-ego Lady Ciclotrón. About this character Sergio Ramírez Franco writes that:

En una primera lectura, yo entendí que María y María Magdalena Pacheco, Lady Ciclotrón, eran el mismo personaje. Ahora pienso que se trata de un proceso de desmultiplicación (un sólo personaje actante encarnado en más de un actor).²⁰³

For the present reading the fact that I would like to stress is the process by which one character shifts into another, a process made possible by clothing. The novel's narrative runs parallel to Lady

²⁰¹ Eielson, *CGN*, p. 76.

²⁰² Federico García Lorca, *El público y Comedia sin título* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1978).

²⁰³ Ramírez Franco 'Las novelas de J. E. Eielson', p. 100.

Ciclotrón's strip-tease, who by the end returns to her more authentic self. Nakedness is for Eielson the authentic state of the body:

Siempre he tenido una instintiva aversión por los vestidos. [...] considero perverso todo lo que vela y oculta el cuerpo humano. Todo lo que lo disimula, lo nubla, lo aísla, lo reprime, lo mutila. *El cuerpo es, para mí, desnudez.*²⁰⁴

However, clothing is also a fundamental extension of a person. It is as 'a second skin'. Both skin and clothing can be considered as *fabrics* that give form and presence to existence, that cover and protect it; the first of these would be a biologic-existential fabric, the second one a socio-cultural one.²⁰⁵ Although existence cannot be reduced to the presence of those material elements, it is through them that a direct or indirect account of existence can be given. Clothing in Eielson's work both covers the body giving it a presence *to* and *in* the world, and it influences the characteristics of a person itself such as in the case of María Magdalena/lady Ciclotrón. On the other hand, a person also infuses his/her particularity to the clothes he/she wears: 'body and dress operate dialectically: dress works on the body, imbuing it with social meaning while the body is a dynamic field which gives life and fullness to dress.'²⁰⁶ In a poem from *Habitación en Roma* clothing addresses modern urban living:

esta ciudad con casas
con restaurantes

²⁰⁴ Eielson, *PMM*, p. 89. My emphasis.

²⁰⁵ Although it could be said that the body itself before clothing already represents a cultural and social context, however for the present argument it is necessary to maintain the division between them. Marcel Mauss argued that the body was educated within a society and that it represented that society through its actions, in 'Techniques of the Body', in *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*, ed., trans. and intro. by Nathan Schlanger (New York: Durkheim; Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), pp. 77-95.

²⁰⁶ Joanne Entwistle, 'The Dressed Body', in *Body Dressing*, ed. by Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 33-58 (p. 36).

con automóviles
con fábricas y cinemas
teatros y cementerios
y escandalosos
avisos luminosos
para anunciar a dios con insistencia
con deslumbrantes criaturas
de papel policromado
que devoran coca-cola
bien helada
con espantosos remates
de vestidos usados ('Azul ultramar', p. 143)

If we take 'usados' to indicate 'second hand', then this can mean that the clothing is not rightfully theirs. The particularity of the clothes has not been given by them but by faceless previous owners. It is not only second hand, but made of pieces: 'espantosos remates/ de vestidos usados'. This can be read as a criticism to the indistinct collective identity of city dwellers, who belong to the city as much as the restaurants and neon gospel signs: '*con restaurantes, con automóviles, con fábricas, con deslumbrantes criaturas.*' Their depictions in the poem resemble images in advertisements, the result of industrial production: 'deslumbrantes criaturas/ de papel policromado'. In fact, we cannot be certain if this is not what Eielson is writing about. Eielson plays here with the ambiguity implied in these images. On the one hand people depicted there are physically attractive; however it is of little importance how beautiful they might be since they devour their cold soft drinks in a series of automated alienating repetitions like the flickering of the neon lights, which replicate the surrounding city and their clothes. The implied speed of the word 'devoran' is concomitant to the speed of city life that devours the individual. These 'criaturas' are alienated because they are not with

themselves insofar as they belong to the city; they *are* only insofar as they are part of it like the cars, lights, and cinemas. Coca-cola becomes a symbol for alienating commercialism and social decay, which they don't drink but devour, which brings to mind Décio Pignatari's poem 'beba coca cola' (*PPÉP*, 128; fig. 5). In both poems Coca-Cola is related to harmful aspects of modern culture. And both play with the marketing aspects of the brand, Eielson in the way people eagerly consume it 'bien helada', Pignatari's in the use of the commercial slogan. In 'Azul ultramar' we find a clear intention to contrast life rhythms: city life against intimate life. Eielson opposes the fast-paced life of the city and the tender intimacy of his lover's body. This intimacy is made manifest by the way in which the lover is addressed: 'criatura'. This is a loving and protecting word.²⁰⁷ In the poem, 'criatura' is a homonym that is also used to describe the Coca-cola drinkers. This is a clear example of Eielson's ambiguous use of language. The same word used in close proximity to signifying contrasting referents. The Coca-cola drinkers are depicted as 'criaturas'. Based on the repetition 'con', it can be established that 'criaturas' bears connotation of impersonality, ownership, machinery, and commerce; of something created. On the other hand, 'Criatura' designates individuality and proximity. The difference is further emphasised by the number: 'criaturas' and 'criatura'. The poem is not denying urban living since the lover is there in the city:

que huele a puro marmol
 (tal cual como tu cuerpo
 criatura
 fabuloso bajo el ruido de mil klaxons
 y motores encendidos) (p. 144)

²⁰⁷ We find this word again in the poem 'Poema para destruir de inmediato' (pp. 155-159) in the context of his childhood memories, where his mother says: 'el café con leche se enfía/ criatura mía/ qué estás esperando' (p. 158).

The negative aspects are not as much in the city as in people's behaviour. The parenthesis opens a second space in the poem; an intimate space. Also the lover is described to exist beneath all urban life, the lover survives beyond that. The rest of the poem is addressed to the Mediterranean, to whom the poet pleads for a meaningful existence:

mediterráneo ayúdame
no me dejes vivir
tan sólo de carne y hueso
haz que despierte nuevamente (p. 140)

What lies inside the parenthesis is directed to the lover alone: 'tal cual como tu cuerpo'. With the supplication to the Mediterranean in mind, we see that the 'criaturas' live 'tan sólo de carne y hueso'. The closing lines reduce the imaginary space from the Mediterranean horizon to the lover's body. The movement into a smaller space is graphically stressed by the use of parenthesis. The intimate space and the larger space of the city are tightly bound together:

en dónde está
el corazón
de esta ciudad que es tu cuerpo
y es el mío
nuestro cuerpo
nuestro río
nuestra iglesia
nuestro abismo? (p. 142)

The city and the lover's body are fused into one, their limits erased. But also the lovers' bodies are joined: 'nuestro cuerpo'. The limits of the bodies, their intimate space and the city melt away. Just before

asking about the heart of the city, the poet is asking about his own heart: '¿dónde está/ mi corazón'. This signals a search, a search for the intimate interior where existence is found. The question for the localisation of his heart implies a preoccupation concerning the localisation of an element, a person or an action within a particular space.

But it is not a particular kind of clothes that makes the difference between someone who lives only 'de carne y hueso' and someone who also has an inner life. In early modern Europe clothing permitted a clear definition of social patterns: 'status symbols visibly divide the social world into categories of persons, thereby helping to maintain solidarity within a category and hostility between different categories.'²⁰⁸ However, in late modernity this is not so evident. In order to illustrate this I will take the example of ties in two poems from the book *Habitación en Roma*. Eielson condenses the symbolism of clothing into a façade that may offer information about social structures, but does not necessarily speak of the quality of the person who is wearing them:

hay personas
correctamente vestidas de gris
con camisa y corbata ciertamente
que a duras penas son personas ('Capella Sistina', p. 168)

It is not the fact that they are wearing ties that makes them hardly people. Eielson is not making a judgement based on the clothing people wear. His observations are based on the way people relate to life, by the way in which they exist. The 'authentic' individual—the one that lives beyond his physical existence—can still wear the same kind of clothes because these are not the basis for his/her existence. What makes the people in the poem hardly people, is that they exist with their 'mil ojos cerrados' (p. 168). They refuse to see the reality in which they live. They

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Encarnación Juárez Almendros, *El cuerpo vestido y la construcción de la identidad en las narrativas autobiográficas del Siglo de Oro* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2006), p. 30.

are unwilling to see and take action: 'antropófagos sin dientes/ que ya no muerden sino admiran' (p. 168). To not have teeth can mean a metaphorical lack of power. This implies that these people cannot do anything except look at life from a safe distance 'una película a colores/ sobre Hiroshima' (p. 168).

This 'safe distance' is one of the elements of the bourgeois attitude as understood by Adorno and Horkheimer in their study the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, specifically in the chapter dedicated to Odysseus and the Sirens.²⁰⁹ Through his cunning Odysseus finds a way to listen to the Sirens' song without succumbing to their power. He ties himself to the mast of the ship and stops with wax his companions' ears. Thus he goes through the experience of the Sirens' song without actually sacrificing himself. By tying himself to the mast and excluding his shipmates from the experience of the song, he keeps a safe distance in order to keep himself safe. However, he did not truly have the experience, if we understand experience 'in its strict sense—the Latin *ex-periri*, a crossing through danger'.²¹⁰ If we take this to be the meaning then we can reason that Odysseus did not 'cross through danger' but that he passed safely along side it. He did not really listen to the Sirens' song. To have an experience implies a transformation; to go through something and come out on the other end transformed. Not to be the same as before the experience. The bourgeois subject must at all times keep himself with himself: 'in primitive bourgeois history it is neutralized [the song] to become merely the wistful longing of the passer-by.'²¹¹ Here there can be recognised certain attitudes as the denial of art and life experiences that take the subject out of himself and into the unknown. The abolition of this safe distance from art and life was what the historical Avant-Garde movements had as a one of their primary concerns. This is also one of

²⁰⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. 43-80.

²¹⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. by Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 18.

²¹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 59.

the key points in Peter Bürger's theory of the Avant-Garde, what he called the historical avant-garde movements' attempts to reunify art and the praxis of life.²¹² In the poem 'Capella Sistina' the people who are hardly people are keeping a safe distance from the actual experience of the work. They are there as passers-by who do not interfere with what they see and it does not transform them. It is not the fact that the people in the Sistine chapel are wearing ties that makes them bourgeois. It is rather their assuming respectability because they are wearing them. The image that they create of themselves through their clothes is disconnected from who they really are. They are hardly people because they maintain a safe distance from life. They are trying to keep themselves safe within the social institutions and conventions from where they extract meaning. This is the subject of the poem 'Memoria para el año de viento inconstante' by Carlos Martínez Rivas:

Sí. Ya sé.

Ya sé yo que lo que os gustaría es una Obra maestra.

Pero no la tendréis.

De mí no la tendréis.

[...]

Aunque sepa hasta qué extremo las amáis.

Se cómo amáis la Música.

No la de los negros, por supuesto. Ni la guitarra

a lo rasgado, por tientos, esa

brisa seca de uñas y plata. Ni el endiablado

son de la Múruca que está en el suelo, o Rosa de

Castilla

con su largo alarido al comienzo...

²¹² Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw, foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Theory and History of Literature*, 4 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 22.

sino ¡BACH!²¹³

The juxtaposition of Bach as the music of the accepted canon and African or otherwise unmediated—un-intellectualised—musical experience draws a clear distinction between the actual experience and the image people have of themselves having the experience of attending a Bach concert on Sundays. To see oneself 'experiencing' excludes the possibility of real experience since the experiencing subject would be abstracted from what is happening. This safe distance will ultimately lead modern city existence to be deprived even of the possibility of experiencing: 'al hombre contemporáneo se le ha expropiado su experiencia: más bien la incapacidad de tener y transmitir experiencias quizás sea uno de los pocos datos ciertos de que dispone sobre sí mismo.'²¹⁴ The hiatus between reality and self image enables the transformation of image into an alternate reality in which *seeing* oneself visiting the Sistine chapel counts *as if* one had had the experience of engaging with the frescoes. As Guy Debord wrote, the spectacle 'is the very heart of society's real unreality,' pointing to this substitution of reality by the reality of images.²¹⁵ Therefore, in this particular case, an item of clothing—ties—becomes a metaphor for obstruction; a metaphor for a life attitude which precludes the very possibility of experience.

Then again, back in the subject of clothing, and particularly that of ties, in 'Ceremonia solitaria alrededor de un tintero' Eielson writes: 'todo el mundo dice que no amo a la gente/ porque me pongo corbata y

²¹³ In Eduardo Milán and Ernesto Lumberras, eds., *Prístina y última piedra: muestra de poesía latinoamericana actual* (Mexico: Aldus, 1999), p. 3; Eduardo Milán, 'Presente de Martínez Rivas', in *Justificación material: ensayos sobre poesía latinoamericana actual* (Mexico: Universidad de la Ciudad de Mexico, 2004), pp. 157-165 (p. 160-163).

²¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, 'Infancia e historia: Ensayo sobre la destrucción de la experiencia', in *Infancia e historia: destrucción de la experiencia y origen de la historia*, trans. by Silvio Mattoni, 3rd rev. edn (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2004), pp. 7-91 (p. 7); and Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*, pp. 83-107; Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 17-22.

²¹⁵ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994), p. 13.

observo el firmamento' (p. 241). The poet is wearing a tie just as the non-people in the Sistine chapel. The difference is that he *observes*. He is engaged with the reality in which he lives. In the poem, 'Poema para destruir de inmediato sobre la poesía la infancia y otras metamorfosis' (pp. 155-159) we see the difference between the actions of the poet and his neighbours with whom he cannot share his happiness:

me despierto a media noche
con los bolsillos llenos
de centellas
y es tan grande mi alegría
que se despiertan los vecinos
con un balde de agua fría
considerando un peligro
el mismo cielo encendido (pp. 155-156)

There is a clear contrast between the poet's response to his reality and the knee-jerk reaction of his neighbours to an apparent threat. Because of their unwillingness to be open to experience the poet cannot communicate his happiness. This is the result of the isolation of urban modern man, who is surrounded by other people who have no intentions of breaking away from convention and who keep themselves inside the comfortable limits in which they assume themselves to be in control of their lives. This risk free environment is particularly bourgeois since it is based on material commodities that create the illusion of a habitable and hazardous-free space: the 'value [of modern interiors] resides neither in appropriation nor in intimacy but in information, in inventiveness, in *control*'.²¹⁶ The poet with stars in his pockets and his overflowing happiness becomes a threat to his neighbours. The reaction is to put him out like a fire: 'se despiertan los vecinos/ con un balde de agua fría'. This

²¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), p. 24. My emphasis.

is the way in which they re-assume control. The neighbours wake up ready to quench the fire that threatens their quiet, peaceful sleep. A sleep that signals their socio-economic class, since a good night's sleep is needed to function in the working world: 'we sleep in accord with the general law which makes our daytime activity depend on our nightly repose.'²¹⁷ For the poet night and sleep are not requisites for his efficiency because unlike the tie-wearers in the Sistine Chapel he has a willingness to experience, an openness that allows him to forget himself and actually live through what is taking place.

Night for the poet becomes a space where the unseen that is hidden by the light of day comes closer to his attention. One of Eielson's performances is called *Dormir es una obra maestra* (fig. 6). The position of the performer's body is vertical; that is, contrary to the way in which most people sleep. She is wrapped in the bedsheets, which at one and the same time keeps her from falling but also keeps her metaphorically bound to the world of sleep. The bed-sheet is what enables the link between the two worlds, the world of sleep and the world of wakefulness. The knots in the canvas signal to this connection. The relationship established between the public and the sleeper/dreamer is one based on the mysterious activity of the performer. Mysterious because the viewer has no access to the dream-world of the sleeper, he has access to her exteriority but not to the world in which she is engaged at the moment. We see the figure wrapped in the bed sheets but we do not have access to the world she is involved in at that moment. It is a play on limitations, similar to that of *Camisa quemada* since the meaning of the piece could be said to be the dynamism between what is seen and what remains unseen. And as I have said, the symbolic bond between the two worlds is the knotted bed-sheet. Then, the point would be not the disclosure of the unseen world, but the simple acknowledgement of its existence. The communication between these two worlds places the body of the sleeper

²¹⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. and intro. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1982), p. 246.

as the middle ground, the limit between them. It belongs to both worlds, it becomes the ground that makes communication between them possible. It seems to me that the point of this performance is the public's involvement. I think that its meaning resides in the viewer's acknowledgement of the sleeper's reality. The sleeper is there but she is not with us. The knots made with the bed sheets signal the connection between both worlds. They hold on to the girl as if she were at risk of falling into the world of sleep. But she is also holding on to the bed as if there was also a risk of falling into the world of wakefulness. She is tied to the bed, to the physical plane from where we see her. However, the twists and folds of the bed sheet are representative of the world of sleep and dreams of which she is temporarily part that feed from reality but that submerge into an unknown plane in order to take form.

Now, this communication brings out an important subject for Eielson who was concerned with the localisation of existence. We witness this in the geographical references in works such as *Paisajes infinitos de la costa del Perú* and titles such as *Habitación en Roma* to more metaphorical localisations. For example, in 'Cuerpo vestido' (p. 195) Eielson frames the body with the clothes: '*entre un zapato y un guante/ hay corbatas sacos y pantalones*'.²¹⁸ This idea of the frame implies the delimitation of space. This framing seems to parody Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, although the parody is not directed at Leonardo's work, but at contemporary man who no longer reflects the 'divine' proportions in either his civilization or culture.²¹⁹ Just as in Leonardo's drawing, 'Cuerpo vestido' presents a contained image but here in a dressed body instead of a circle within a square: 'clothing as a structure [is] simultaneously capable of framing the subject and dispersing it across

²¹⁸ My emphasis.

²¹⁹ Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (London: Dent & Sons, 1981), pp. 115-117. There are several direct references to Leonardo in Eielson's work. For example, the poem 'La sonrisa de Leonardo es una rosa cansada', the installation 'Código sobre el vuelo de las aves y sobre los anudamientos de Leonardo' from 1993, or from that same year the installation on the theme of Leonardo's *Last Supper*.

multiple surfaces.²²⁰ At present, more attention will be given to the framing and what takes place inside that frame, because it is towards the *inside* that the poem moves. An *inside* that is more physical than metaphysical, biological rather than emotional or psychological. Eielson is evoking the physical space of the body whose boundaries are the items of clothing that cover it, as Merleau-Ponty argues:

The word 'here' applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external co-ordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks.²²¹

According to Merleau-Ponty it is this 'anchoring' and 'situating' of the body in relation to its tasks that create a presence in the world: 'in virtue of its being polarized by its tasks, of its *existence towards* them [...] the body image is finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world.'²²² This anchoring is given by the clothes in the poem 'Cuerpo vestido'; they are the objects that form a spatial horizon to the body. The clothes as objects are also the limit, the frontier before the world that belong to both the body and the world. For Eielson clothing and the body are strata that give matter and shape to the mystery of existence. Clothing is not seen as separate from the body but interrelated with it, like the interrelated twists of a knot:

Siempre luchando

Con mis intestinos mi tristeza

Mi pantalón y mi camisa ('Cuerpo en exilio', p. 190)

²²⁰ Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body* (Oxford: Breg, 1998), p. 35.

²²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002; repr. 2004), p. 115.

²²² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 115.

The first line signals to an agent who seems to have some distance from the other elements. These elements are conveniently organised one under the other, first the internal, viscera and emotions; then the external, clothing. The metaphorical distance between them suggests the accumulation of strata that I have been proposing so far in regards to the economy of the body and clothing in the work of Eielson. The agent who is struggling is doing so against the elements listed below him. Clothing in 'Cuerpo vestido' is stating a fact of presence, of being there in-the-world, just as later a gland will make an act of presence: 'hay corbatas/... hay una glándula.'²²³ This use of the impersonal form of 'haber' again implies a certain distance. Eielson is asserting their existence and presence; it is the way things are, the natural *order of things*. Both objects—'corbatas' and 'glándula'—are granted the same value of being present.

However, further on the same poem we find the following: 'me duele la bragueta y el mundo entero'. Here the separation suggested before is cancelled. The trousers, and the world, are part of him. This points to a crucial aspect in Eielson's poetics: the relationship between exteriority and interiority. As we established with Merleau-Ponty the clothes are the objects that frame the body, that provide it with a spatial horizon. But in these lines that we are currently discussing the trousers have become part of the body. The limit that the clothes represented has not been sustained; the limits are not solid, they are incorporated, but have not disappeared all together. The zipper is a doorway, an entrance between the world and the body. The zipper is the possibility of contact, that while being dressed the sexual and eschatological impulses have an access into the world. So, while in the first example there seemed to be a separation between the body and clothing which nevertheless were considered as elements which formed the existence of the speaking

²²³ My emphasis.

agent, in the second example Eielson fuses these elements, expanding his sensations to his clothing.

In some poems Eielson regards clothing as a trace left by people who are either dead or asleep. Unlike the organic body clothing does not disappear into the earth. Clothing functions then as a record of their existence. In the absence of the person the clothes worn by her are considered as vestiges of existence. Eielson anticipates this by writing: 'quisiera ser de nylon/ [...] de sonrientes materias que no mueren' ('7', p. 181). This preoccupation is also present in his commentaries on pre-Columbian textiles, particularly in the way the geological conditions of Peru were necessary of their preservation.²²⁴ The durability of clothing is indicated in the following poem:

Sin saber que su sonrisa
Sus vestidos y sus huesos
Paseaban tranquilamente
Hace millares de años (p. 203)

This fragment does not only indicate the durability of clothes. I think that it shows the permanence of the mystery, that to which the body and clothes give shape. In the opening chapter of Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality* the narrator wonders whether the gestures of a woman coming out of a swimming pool are hers alone or if there is a limited number of gestures from which we all draw.²²⁵ The question that Kundera suggests is about the pre-existence of form. Eielson's lines also suggest that clothing possesses durability beyond that of human existence but also something about the individuality or originality of existence, that is neither so original nor individual; this not in order to undermine it, but to understand it in its true value. This is not anti-Humanism on behalf of

²²⁴ 'Luz y transparencia en los tejidos el antiguo Perú', in *Nu/do*, pp. 317-321.

²²⁵ Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. by Peter Kussi (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 1-49.

Eielson, but a proposal to express that Life and not human life is the most important.

There are other instances in the poetry where the correspondence between body and clothing is made more explicit, for example: 'heme sin cabeza y sin calzado' ('Via Appia Antica', p. 139) and

Confundo mi cabeza con mi ombligo
Mi corazón con mis zapatos
[...]
Para luego despertarme y darme cuenta
Que nada de eso es posible que verdaderamente
Tengo la cabeza en el ombligo
El corazón en los zapatos ('Ceremonia solitaria ante un espejo
cualquiera', p. 249)

In 'Via Appia Antica' we are again presented with a juxtaposition of the two extremes of the body: the head and the feet. In the lines from 'Ceremonia solitaria ante un espejo cualquiera' he plays with a similar idea. A Cubist-like rearrangement of spatial localisation of particular body parts: the head in the navel and the heart in the shoes. His confusion is dispelled when he wakes up to realise that he was not confused in his sleep, but rather that such is the economy of 'reality'. This equalisation of the different strata that form existence, something we have seen before with the ties and glands, leads up to the objectification of the different elements. This seems to have a plastic function; that is a more artistically malleable disposition. This possibility to manipulate elements responds to the poet's necessity to address the *negativity* of existence. That is, the 'mystery' of existence that remains ineffable. This 'mystery' of existence is given presence by the clothes and the body; they give *mass* to that 'mystery'. The existence of the elements as objects makes it possible to set them in relation to the ineffable, so as to indirectly point to its

existence. For Eielson existence is here, in the individual person. This can be exemplified by Eielson's work with knotted fabrics. A knot is a mass of intertwined fabric. This is its shape and presence. But if this knot were to be disentangled and straightened out, then all that would remain would be a flat cloth. It is in the volume that the knot forms that the mystery takes reality. If we extrapolate this to human existence, we would find that it is because of the body—from cells to viscera to skin—and clothing that existence has a presence in-the-world. In 'Cuerpo vestido' Eielson moves from the inner body to the clothing and vice versa—which could be said to be the pattern of a knot. This dynamism illustrates the simultaneous presence of the interior and the exterior. However, in Eielson this interiority is not only an inner space. This interiority is mainly the physical interiority of the body. But within it, the secret of existence lies, that ineffable which keeps the elements together, that was there before the accumulation of parts gave form to a particular existence. This interior body is also like a dress, a temporal exteriority: 'hay tejidos que sonríen/ y tejidos que se mueren' ('Cuerpo vestido', p. 195). Eielson is playing with the double meaning of the word 'tejido' as both textile and tissue. This combination further homogenises the two, the clothing and the body. Such identification between the body and clothes concerns their relationship with the 'mystery' of existence. Everything from the cells to the glands to the hat and the gloves seems to *be on the outside*, or to be *the* outside of this 'mystery', which, nevertheless, would not have a presence without them. But the question about interiority remains. Could it be that the twisting and folding of textiles does not signify a profound *inside* but that the volume and mass formed by the twisted and folded textile is what there *is*. The folds in the textile create an interiority but there is also nothing there besides this density created by the knotted textile. Eielson gives us exactly this image of the knotted textile forming a mass in the poem 'La sonrisa de Leonardo es una rosa cansada' (pp. 246-248): 'mi corazón/ crece y crece como un tumor de

terciopelo'. A tumour is basically an uncontrolled overgrowth of cellular tissue. By this I do not mean to suggest that existence for Eielson is a tumor, but that the expansion of matter is the presence of existence.

Sometimes clothing also signals to an absence. The clothes worn throughout the day and left resting on the back of a chair or the empty dress that flows in the wind hanging by the balcony represent the person who wore them. This is an extension of the life of the wearer that is palpable *in* the clothes themselves. When the person is dead or asleep the clothes are still his or hers because they have *become* part of that person's existence. In charging clothing with meaning in this way Eielson appropriates a modern commodity taking it out of its more typical semantic context. Clothes express something about the person who wears them but not because they were chosen for that purpose. Rather, it is because the person who wears them infuses them with his own life that they truly become his or hers. Thus, when Eielson's lover leaves her clothes on a chair while she is sleeping, these are still charged with her presence:

hacia dónde vuela todo
cuando duermes
dejando en una silla
tan sólo una camisa
un pantalón encendido
y un callejón de ceniza
de la cocina a la nada ('Albergo del Sole I', p. 160)

The concrete element in these lines is the clothing on the chair. If we think of this fragment as if the elements were arranged according to the laws of perspective in a painting, the chair would be the most prominent element while the 'hacia dónde' and 'nada' act as vanishing points. This vanishing point is visually marked by the trail of ash leading

to the kitchen and onwards to nothingness. And this movement toward nothingness is constant in Eielson's poetry.²²⁶ In poems like 'Albergo del Sole I' Eielson is dealing with the search for the person's existence and its relation with the sleeping body. The 'pantalones encendidos' have become a signal, a trace of the sleeping person. The trousers are no longer fulfilling their utilitarian role but they still are imbued with the 'aura' of the person who wore them.²²⁷ The path of ashes from the kitchen to nothingness creates a peculiar circularity in the poem since the first two lines of the second verse are: '¿en dónde está tu cuerpo/ cuando comes'. Eielson's attention to the everyday occurrences stems from the awareness that poetry 'ha reconquistado su máximo valor, su máxima juventud, limitándose únicamente a subrayar nuestros más perfectos y profundos momentos de amor, de plenitud o de dolor... signifiquen mucho o no signifiquen nada.'²²⁸ Questioning about existence next to a mainly physical act such as eating connects 'Albergo del Sole I' with the idea sketched here about the limiting of language to underline moments of intensity. Moments which have become *events* before the poem was written, unlike in Gironde or concrete poetry where the poem is the final event. To leave one's clothes resting on a chair is an everyday occurrence. But in the poem, by connecting them with the absence of the person who wore them, they become a trace of that person. There is a close parallel in Eielson's visual work where both sides of what has been discussed are united. The work is entitled *Requiem por Marilyn Monroe* of 1962 (fig. 7) and it underlines the unity between clothes and absence.

²²⁶ Throughout Eielson's poetry the reader finds references to the number zero as a symbol of absence for example in the poems '2' of *Mutatis mutandis* in *VEOM*, p. 176 and in 'Cero' of *Tema y variaciones* in Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Poesía escrita* (Mexico: Vuelta, 1989), p. 89; or in the reference to nothingness in the poem '9' of *Mutatis mutandis*, p. 183.

²²⁷ The term 'aura' is taken from Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, pp. 211-244. Although Benjamin's essay refers to the work of art, according to philosopher Eligio Díaz it is possible to use this concept in reference to objects of mass production. Díaz joins Benjamin's concept of the loss of aura to Rilke's idea of the personal use of an object to 'mark it' and thus make it again unique and personal, which could point once again to the recovery of that lost aura. Díaz explained to me his idea during a conversation in Mexico City, July 2007.

²²⁸ It is in this regard that William Rowe compares Eielson's poetics to those of the anti-poetry of Nicanor Parra in 'Sólo silencio: Jorge Eduardo Eielson (1924-2006)', *El poeta y su trabajo*, 22 (2006), 13-27.

The photographed head—printed in monochrome—of Monroe is placed on top of a black brassiere, the body's silhouette shaped by darker shades from the background as if it were rising from beneath the pannel. The printed ghostly head of the then recently deceased pop icon rests above the ready made brassiere creating an effect of difference between the two realities: the real item of clothing and the reproduction. This assemblage portrays the tension between absence and presence not only between the dead pop-star and the brassiere, but between the different materials used. But contrary to what one might expect, it is the brassiere that becomes the focus of our attention and not the face. This could probably be because the 'real' item of clothing is a more palpable link between the work and our world. There is something similar in 'Albergo del Sole II' (p. 161):

un día
abrirás la puerta y me verás dormido
[...]
y verás también mi corazón
y mi camisa de alas blancas
pidiendo auxilio en el balcón

The shirt waving from the balcony recalls the *Requiem por Marilyn Monroe*. The shirt draws our attention, from inside the room to the outside beyond the balcony. The balcony and the shirt waving from it are the link between the sleeping poet and the outside. The shirt is asking for help, just as Monroe's fading face seems to be asking for help against her fading away. In both poems 'Albergo del Sole I' and II the person asleep is treated as absent as if in this condition they approximated death, and thus were, however momentarily, out of this world. For the present context, Eielson's work is an invitation to look *inside*; to look inside his room in the poems from *Habitación en Roma* and the novel *El cuerpo de*

Giulia-no, to look inside his body in the images of intestines and glands, to look inside his own existence and question after the vanishing point.

As I have been able to show, clothing in the work of Eielson functions not only as a limit between the world and the body but as a dynamic presence that enables the presentation of the human body, but that it also is a presence in itself, beyond the wearer. Ultimately it is a limit, a catalyst for the different sides of existence.

2. TRANSIT

The transit between clothing to nudity in the work of Eielson will be the main focus of this section. This will tie up with the general objective of the chapter which is to show Eielson's considerations about presence. In order to elucidate the concept of transit, I will explore his play *Acto final* and some aspects of his novel *Primera muerte de María*.²²⁹ Eielson assigns great significance to the state of transition. It is a state of being in constant 'present participle', always becoming, always in an *in between*. This reveals that for Eielson the work of art, but also existence, is a constant process that can never be concluded. This is the relevant aspect of this issue for the overall argument of this chapter, that from the examples that will be analysed here life emerges as in a constant state of flux where rigid compartmentalising is questioned.

Acto final can be understood as a 'mixed means theatre' following Richard Kostelanetz's definition of this concept since in it speech is not the structuring principle of the play.²³⁰ The characters of the play, most

²²⁹ *Acto final* is one of his two known plays in *AP*, pp. 457-460; the other one is entitled *Maquillaje* from the late 1940s. A fragment of this second play will become available in the forthcoming volume *Ceremonia comentada: Eielson por sí mismo 1946-2005: Ensayos y declaraciones sobre arte, estética y cultura*, ed. by Luis Rebaza Soralez (Lima: Museo de arte de Lima, [in print]).

²³⁰ Richard Kostelanetz understands experimental or alternative 'theatre' as *mixed means theatre*, which he subdivides into Pure Happenings, Staged Happenings, Staged Performances and Kinetic Environments. The most basic difference between traditional theatre and mixed means theatre is that, for Kostelanetz, 'speech is here de-emphasized and the means of expression are thoroughly mixed', in *On Innovative Performance(s): Three Decades of Recollections on Alternative Theatre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), p. 7; this same point is raised in the introduction to his *The Theatre of Mixed Means: 'the new theatre generally eschews the language of words'*, in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments and Other Mixed-Means Performances* (London: Pitman, 1970), pp. 3-4.

of them also found in the novel—Pedro, José, Charlie, María Magdalena and lady Ciclotrón—undress themselves or are undressed by others. The novel is structured by parallel performance-like events: a religious procession and lady Ciclotrón's striptease. There is a third element in the novel's structure. Eielson wrote most of it in the late 1950s but then he wrote commentaries on the text in the late 80s. This is indeed significant because it makes a *voyeur* of the writer himself. In the written poetry undressing moves beyond the skin into a more radical disappearance of the body that requires a particular analysis. The transitory state of undressing found in the poems will be analysed at a further stage of this work since it has different significations that although complementary to the present analysis, bear different implications that will further illuminate Eielson's work.

Acto final is a one act play. The action takes place inside a monochromatic purple room with a purple bed; a religious stamp of the 'Señor de los Milagros' with whom the colour purple is associated; a radio and a photograph of Marilyn Monroe.²³¹ As the scene is slowly illuminated we see Pedro's body lying on the bed; the audience is not supposed to be able to tell whether he is dead or just asleep. José is next to the body and lady Ciclotrón is crying by the foot of the bed. Through a door enters María, followed by Charlie and his assistants who are dressed all in white 'como enfermeros' also wearing white masks; these set up a camera, speakers and microphones throughout the room.²³² Through the speakers can be heard the sounds of the ocean and sea-birds. The radio plays Bach. Small actions are performed. There are random entrances of new characters that populate the room: Roberto and Doña Paquita; a group of homeless people; the 'Hombres Violeta', who enter through a mirror. Some characters utter unintelligible or inaudible speeches. Apart from these, there are hardly any lines in the play. The text of the play itself reads as a guide of loose stage movements and actions. Some characters

²³¹ Eielson, *Acto final*, in *AP*, pp. 457-460.

²³² Eielson, *Acto final*, p. 457.

exit as randomly as they entered. Some hide under the bed. Then Pedro's body is mutilated. Lady Ciclotrón 'enciende una radio a transistores y se la introduce en la vagina'²³³. She climbs on top of a table and performs a striptease. The 'hombres violeta' follow her lead and undress themselves. Charlie and his assistants are undressed by the homeless people. When lady Ciclotrón is finished she encourages the public to undress also. In the end the characters exit the scene towards the sea. That the scene is set by the shore is important because it is a place of limits. This is the setting of *Primera muerte de María* also, and of the series of canvas called *Paisajes infinitos de la costa del Perú*. The geographical setting speaks of the limit or fringe space that the characters inhabit.

Because of the extreme actions in this play it is difficult not to think of Artaud's ideas about the Theatre of Cruelty. Through these Artaud wanted to rebuild the expressive and communicative possibilities of theatre based on 'drastic action pushed to the limit.'²³⁴ Artaud's ideas are based on an opposition to psychological theatre and appeals first to the audience's sensibilities rather than to its rational mind: 'it is ridiculous to appeal primarily to our understanding.'²³⁵ However, cruelty for Artaud does not only mean physical or psychological torture, since its intellectual significance has repercussions of great value. In this sense, cruelty means strictness, absolute determination.²³⁶ Most importantly, Artaud writes that 'there is no cruelty without consciousness, without the application of consciousness.'²³⁷ The basic notion is that extreme actions will jolt our senses and understanding into consciousness about reality. For Artaud theatre was supposed to transform its audience.²³⁸ In this way *Acto final* is directly related to Artaud's idea of theatre in which 'metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body.'²³⁹ By

²³³ Eielson, *Acto final*, p. 459.

²³⁴ Antonin Artaud, 'Theatre and Cruelty', in *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder, 1993), pp. 64-67 (p. 65).

²³⁵ Artaud, 'Theatre and Cruelty', p. 65.

²³⁶ Artaud, 'Letters of Cruelty', in *The Theatre and Its Double*, pp. 79-80 (p. 79).

²³⁷ Artaud, 'Letters of Cruelty', p. 80.

²³⁸ Albert Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty* (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 11.

²³⁹ Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto', in *The Theatre and Its Double*, pp. 68-78 (p. 77).

metaphysics Artaud understands the transcendence of the individual.²⁴⁰ The transcendence of the individual from his body, although not understood in precisely the same way, is crucial for Eielson too; I will speak of this later. The impact on the audience must be first directed to the senses because 'what matters is that our sensibility is put into a deeper, subtler state of perception by assured means, the very object of magic and ritual.'²⁴¹ And it is through this altered state of perception that the audience will ultimately question the world they inhabit and their place in it. Since Eielson's play does not appeal to our understanding but rather to our senses through illogical but emotive and powerful actions we can conclude that *Acto final* indeed belongs to this context.

With its mono-chromatic room *Acto final* creates from the outset an oneiric atmosphere. The audience does not have to wait for actions or language to create this. The mono-chromatic motif is also used by Eielson in other performances and installations such as *El paisaje infinito de la costa del Perú (Primera muerte de María)* or the *Homenaje a Leonardo, La última cena*. Eielson considers this colour as symbolic of 'gran parte de la desventura humana, de la adversidad y de la muerte.'²⁴² Due to the disposition of the players, as the lights slowly illuminate the stage, *Acto final* looks like the closing scene from a previous performance frozen in a final *tableau vivant*.²⁴³ What appears is what seems to have been the ending of a different play we did not see, and that now becomes a beginning. This loop suggests a structure in a constant state of action, the final scene that becomes the first scene of a new performance. This could also be read in the variations on particular themes in Eielson's work. Themes, characters, actions, colours in one piece feed a series of other works creating a net-like pattern. The gradual illumination that opens the scene is an invitation to the audience/reader to this nocturnal

²⁴⁰ Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto', p. 69.

²⁴¹ Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto', p. 70.

²⁴² Eielson, *PMM*, p. 37.

²⁴³ '(No hay telón. La escena va surgiendo paulatinamente, a partir de la más completa oscuridad),' Eielson, *Acto final*, in *AP*, p. 457.

world that begins once the daytime production is over. It is an invitation to believe in the illusion of theatre, as Artaud would say: 'the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, no[t] for a servile imitation of reality.'²⁴⁴ The slow illumination of the purple room would create a sense of immersion into the world of the play; a world that does not exclude the audience. On the contrary, the absence of a curtain to separate the stage from the world of the audience emphasises the illusion that the world of the play could have always been there, hiding in the dark. The fact that the audience is encountering it now becomes a question about illuminating the right spot, from the right angle. A parallelism can be drawn with sleep and death, both of them seemingly final acts. The first of the day's activities and the second of life's. But the onlookers cannot know what is really happening inside the person who is asleep, just as we cannot know what happens after death, in Hamlet's words: 'for in that sleep of death what dreams may come'.²⁴⁵ In Eielson's work the theme of approximating the latent side of existence is made explicit in performances such as *Dormir es una obra maestra*. From a slightly different perspective the title of the performance is related to poems like:

Me gustaría escribir
 Como si cantara como si bailara
 Como si subiera y bajara
 Una escalera cualquiera
 En una ciudad cualquiera
 Me gustaría escribir
 Como si durmiera como si jugara (p. 206)

In this poem and in *Dormir es una obra maestra* creation is seen as natural and unmediated. The girl in the performance has become a

²⁴⁴ Artaud, 'Theatre and Cruelty', p. 65.

²⁴⁵ *Hamlet*, III. 1. 66.

hinge between the unmediated world of the subconscious and the waking world. This turns this particular piece into one about equilibrium: the significance lies in the limit between the two worlds and the possible communication between them.

Acto final is part of a series of permutations on the theme of the novel *Primera muerte de María*. The play and the novel have the same characters and both take place by the sea. I would read these variations as analogous to what I said about the opening of the play. It suggests the idea that the characters and the themes inhabit a space *in between* flanked by different works. The sea is, in this context, a metaphor for a constantly variable shoreline. And in this respect, it shares in the theme of the *in between* which I have also identified elsewhere in Eielson's work.

There are three actions within the play on which I will now concentrate. These actions emphasise the theme of transition between spaces or states of being that suggest that the play itself can be considered as a space *in between*. The actions that I will analyse are: the mutilation of Pedro's body; lady Ciclotrón and the transistor radio; and the denudation of the characters. What these actions have in common is that they are states of transition, of transformation: the passage from closure to disclosure and vice versa—cutting, inserting, and undressing.

On the purple bed lies Pedro's body. Charlie and his assistants 'con el rostro cubierto por mascararas blancas rodean el cuerpo de Pedro. Le cercenan el miembro, dan unos pasos hacia la ventana y lo avientan a los pájaros.'²⁴⁶ This looks like part of a mysterious ritual mutilation. The wearing of masks could indicate either a transfiguration of their human selves into mystical entities charged with some measure of religious power from which the mutilation would acquire metaphysical meaning; or it could indicate, by hiding their faces behind the masks, their transfiguration into symbols of the community: 'the purpose of the most

²⁴⁶ Eielson, *Acto final*, p. 458.

brutal and apparently archaic rituals is not merely to relax taboos [...] but literally to re-create the community by re-enacting a process of community disintegration and reintegration.²⁴⁷ After the mutilation Pedro's body becomes a key. It is now an in-between state, a frontier in its own right. A cadaver belongs to both worlds, the living and the dead. It is the mark, still present, of death in the world of the living. Bataille would argue that one of the reasons for the origin of burial is the general threat the cadaver poses for the living, thus driving primitive people to place it underground to protect themselves: 'burial alone allows us to say that these men were afraid of the dead and that, to escape the threat the dead represented, they made them disappear beneath the earth'.²⁴⁸ The exposed cadaver is like the work of art. It belongs to both worlds, of the living and of the dead.

Also with the mutilation Pedro's body is a symbolical transmutation from male to female. Pedro's body becomes a symbol of transcendence; a Janus—god of beginnings, passages, doorways and bridges—looking into the world of the dead while still present in that of the living. In this sense the transition brought about by Pedro's mutilation questions the body's sexual identity, and by extension identity itself. As Bataille wrote, 'obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality'.²⁴⁹ Through the dismemberment we are pushed to reconsider the body's stable identity and individuality, one in which the boundaries between what belongs and does not belong to it are clearly defined. I think Eielson is displaying the transition from male to female,

²⁴⁷ Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, intro. by Burton Mack, commentary by Renato Rosaldo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 127.

²⁴⁸ Georges Bataille, 'The Cradle of Humanity', in *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, ed. by Stuart Kendall, trans. by Michelle and Stuart Kendall (New York: Zone, 2005), pp. 143-173 (pp. 153-154).

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Perinola, 'Between Clothing and Nudity', in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi, 3 vols (New York: Zone, 1989) II, pp. 236-265 (p. 245).

from the 'external' penis to the 'internal' vagina, thus indicating the relationship between the seen and the unseen.

The second action is focused on lady Ciclotrón and the transistor radio. This is a literal action of concealment and a metaphor of space. The radio is now hidden. This concealment plays against our knowledge. Inside a space to which we do not have access to the radio keeps playing. This has parallels in and out of the play. In the play there is an overt act of concealment when José covers María with a blanket, under which she 'esboza' a few movements before remaining still.²⁵⁰ This image of the concealment of a human figure under a large canvas is present in other performances such as *La escalera infinita* (see fig. 8), *Interruption*, and *Paracas* (see fig. 9). This theme is critical in the poetry and it is identifiable through images where the body is dismembered or the insides of the body are exposed. These exposures of hidden spaces are also indicative of *that* which takes place beyond our direct experience.

The questioning of body space was a recurrent theme explored in performance art in the 1960s and 70s.²⁵¹ The transistor radio in *Acto final* can be read as an inversion of the famous *Interior Scroll* performance by Carolee Schneemann.²⁵² With her body painted with mud Schneemann stood on top of a table and unravelled a paper scroll from her vagina, reading it as it became revealed. In Schneemann's concept of *vulvic space* we find an inversion of phallic symbolism.²⁵³ Phallic symbols would be outward models of vulvic space. The paring of values enables access to a different dimension of knowledge and consciousness:

I thought of the vagina in many ways—physically, conceptually, as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the sources of sacred

²⁵⁰ Eielson, *Acto final*, p. 458.

²⁵¹ Tracy Warr, ed., *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon, 2000), pp. 144-145; Günter Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 132-171; Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 66-87.

²⁵² David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 191; Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, pp. 130-134.

²⁵³ Schneemann, 'Interior Scroll', in *The Artist's Body*, p. 250

knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiralled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual powers. This source of 'interior knowledge' would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh.²⁵⁴

It is in the acknowledgement of space, the 'passage from the visible to the invisible' that Schneemann writes about, that I see the connection between *Interior Scroll* and *Acto final*. In both performances the vagina represents an interior space and in both performances this space is connected to communication. The relationship between space and presence is important for Eielson's poetics, where what is seen has a direct tie with the unseen. The unseen is latent in the seen at all times. It is the task of the poet to approximate it through words, images, spaces, or concepts where its existence becomes evident. That is, not illuminating or transforming the unseen into something visible but rather acknowledging its existence *as it is*. In this context, Eielson's following comment on the nature of poetry reinforces the previous observations about this: 'la poesía echa raíces en las tinieblas, es verdad, pero se orienta hacia la luz'.²⁵⁵ In the image used by Eielson we can see that the darkness is not meant to be conquered. This association between the seen and the unseen, light and darkness, interior and exterior is what I see as one of the main subjects of *Acto final*. This is also why Schneemann's performance is relevant to the present discussion since it connects her concept of 'interior knowledge' to an interior/exterior experience: 'a representation of the transition from interior thought to external signification'.²⁵⁶ Knowledge is there directly related to the body,

²⁵⁴ Schneemann, 'Interior Scroll', in *The Artist's Body*, p. 251.

²⁵⁵ Eielson, 'Martín Adán', in *Nu/do*, pp. 83-86 (p. 83).

²⁵⁶ Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance*, p. 143.

and from the body does not emerge an abstract discourse but the materiality of the scroll. The main action in the performance is the transition from internal to external. In *Acto final* the opposite happens. The transistor radio—a symbol of modern mobile communication—*returns* to lady Ciclotrón's 'vulvic space'. This action signals a hidden bridge of communication, bypassing the exterior that belongs to the world. In this way the body returns to a sacred-symbiotic communication and, at the same time, it reappropriates the body's exteriority.

The third action to be analysed is undressing. This is not exclusive to one character since most of the characters undress at one point or another. I will, however concentrate more on lady Ciclotrón since her striptease also forms the core of the novel. And it is from this parallel to the novel that we can draw the significance of undressing since it closely follows the striptease of Lady Ciclotrón.

Lady Ciclotrón's striptease is one of the elements that creates the structure of the novel. The others are the use of commentaries on the narrative and the writing process written at a latter stage, and the religious procession of the *El Señor de los Milagros*: 'cada una de sus preciosas prendas correspondía a cada una de las caídas y las palabras del Señor.'²⁵⁷ In the novel, the striptease is a purifying rite. Undressing becomes a deceptive paradoxical shifting of forms of existence. The more others can see of her flesh, the farther away they get from seeing what 'sus manos escondían bajo esos guantes'.²⁵⁸ Her individuality is not bound to her exterior image. To know her is to go beyond appearances. And because in the play she is not the only character to get undressed this would suggest that it is not only her who truly exists beyond exteriority.

But nudity does not equal the surrender of intimacy. We see this in the relationship between Pedro and Charlie in the novel *Primera muerte de María*. Charlie, a rich white man from the city, has objectified Pedro.

²⁵⁷ *PMM*, p. 21.

²⁵⁸ *PMM*, p. 13.

Charlie makes Pedro surrender his sexual body but cannot approximate his more intimate, authentic body. When Pedro grows tired of Charlie's behaviour the only thing that prevents him from storming out of the bedroom is his inability to get dressed quickly. He is trying to put on the clothes that Charlie had bought for him that, although a gift, do not really belong to him. He feels more than uncomfortable in them, he cannot *be* in them:

Pedro se puso los pantalones y un *pullover*, pero se los puso al revés. Se los volvió a quitar. Se puso los pantalones nuevamente, y se enfundó en el *pullover* y salió dando un portazo. No había aprendido a vestirse todavía. Nunca aprendería. Y pensar que había deseado tanto esas ropas suaves, tibias, elegantes. ¡Pero le costaban demasiado! *Recordó su desnudez en el mar. Su verdadera desnudez. No ese simulacro de su cuerpo a que lo obligaba Charlie. No ese simulacro de su sexo, que nada tenía que hacer con su sexo.* Los zapatos le dolían. El calzoncillo pequeñísimo y estrecho le apretaba los huevos y le impedía caminar a su manera. Ya casi no respiraba.²⁵⁹

The difference between the real body and its 'simulacro' is essential. The body that Charlie possessed was indeed Pedro's body. However, it was not his real intimate body in the sense that it was out of context, extracted from the roots that gave him meaning. Pedro's 'simulacro' exists in a void, unrelated to the past, to work, to the sea and sand of his origins. Therefore, there is an insurmountable *space* between the body—'su verdadera desnudez'—and its simulacrum, between sex and its simulacrum. This simulacrum is not necessarily just a projection of the other's desire, but also its acceptance on the part of the objectified person. Both play the game. Charlie objectifies Pedro and Pedro unfolds

²⁵⁹ *PMM*, p. 43. My emphasis.

giving Charlie this object of his creation and his desire. This is the creation of a double. But Pedro is the one who loses in this simulated triangle since Charlie no longer relates to him but to his double, he does not touch his body but its double. The realisation is too much to bear: how is Pedro going to recover his existence; how is he going to close the gap opened by that split? In life Pedro sees no way back to himself; his image exists, he no longer does. This recovery can happen only in death; as Blanchot said, it is the cadaver that which begins to resemble itself.²⁶⁰ Baudrillard writes about the construction of a body image and the neutralisation of the real organic body. Although as a sociologist his analysis is focused on society I think that, however, some of its particulars seem pertinent for further elucidating the example of Charlie and Pedro since it summarises the movement between the creation of a body double and the consequent atrophy of the real:

This whole movement of construction of an artificial double of the body and desire ends in the pornographic, the culmination of a henceforth desireless hyper-body, of a now indifferent and useless sexual function.²⁶¹

The creation of a simulacrum cancels the intimacy of sexuality. Pedro needs to relive his own physical reality, to breathe again—in the clothes that Charlie has bought for him he can no longer breathe. Breath symbolises the spirit, the breath of life which he no longer has and needs to recover. This is why he drowns himself tied to a rock that will keep him *under* water. He does not only drown himself but he makes sure that he remains in the sea. It is only then, symbolically surrounded by the waters of the origin, that he is able to permanently close the gap. It is there that he is back in his 'verdadera desnudez'. José finds him with his eyes still

²⁶⁰ Maurice Blanchot, 'Two Versions of the Imaginary', in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, ed. by P. Adams Sitney, trans. by Lydia Davis (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1981), pp. 80-89 (p. 83).

²⁶¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1996), p. 127.

open. José's fishing net pulls Pedro's body up and 'bajo la presión, el cuerpo de Pedro se había encogido, como si hubiera regresado al seno materno.'²⁶² Pedro's death is relevant because the tipping point is marked by clothes. His naked body is also the visual centre of the stage, to which attention is drawn.

Coming back to our primary example of undressing, in the novel lady Ciclotrón performs her striptease thinking about her lovers, as if she is taking her clothes for their eyes only. But even when she has taken off her dress, while on stage she is still lady Ciclotrón. It is the creation of this alter-ego that makes it possible for her to take off her costume in a ritual of greater significance for her than the satisfaction of the costumers. For her the ritual implies going back to her intimate body. This is just what Pedro does when he goes back to the sea. In a way they are both searching for a return to their own intimate interiority. Lady Ciclotrón is the alter-ego of María Magdalena, the name of the repentant sinner. The religious symbolism does not rest only on her name but is underpinned by the procession of the Señor de los Milagros and the comparison between her striptease and the Passion of Christ.²⁶³ It seems that she can only approximate her true intimate self through this public performance which both creates and sheds her mask but at the same time keeps her concealed from the public. Just as in the Passion Christ is publicly displayed until his death. And it is only through death that the true essence of Christ could become realised. Although the legends and myths about Mary Magdalen differ throughout history it is common to associate her with the repentant sinner leading a hermetic life clothed only by her hair.²⁶⁴ But what is even more revealing is that the figure of Mary Magdalen has through the ages been also associated with clothing

²⁶² *PMM*, p. 52.

²⁶³ *PMM*, p. 21.

²⁶⁴ Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 119; it is also interesting to note that Mary Magdalen is the patron saint of 'glove-makers, coiffeurs, seamstresses, shoemakers, whittawers and wool-weavers', in Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 135. It is not possible in the present work to explore at depth the religious symbolism of the figure of Mary Magdalen in the work of Eielson. This seems to be a key issue that has not been properly analysed by scholars.

and nakedness.²⁶⁵ It is to this transition between clothing and nakedness that I now turn my attention, to then draw conclusions about the three actions I have been exploring so far. According to Roland Barthes 'it is only the time taken in shedding clothes which makes voyeurs of the public.'²⁶⁶ This transitory moment is the key for this aspect of Eielson's work. The transition is only located between being covered and being uncovered. The costume that Lady Ciclotrón's takes off during her performance is like a peeling off of layers. This is paralleled in the way the novel structured. These layers enter into a play of seen and unseen elements of existence throughout the narrative. And just as the satin purple dress gives way to fragments of flesh, the flesh becomes a doorway into a deeper hidden existence. Just as with Pedro's body, this existence has a physical presence. It cannot, however, be reduced to the tangible body, but this is what we can know. In a scene from the novel *Primera muerte de María* we see this in the urgency to go beyond the body. Not towards a metaphysical plane, but deeper inside the body, into the organs and the marrow of the bones. It is a desire to disintegrate the beloved's body in search for the immutable centre of her being. I will analyse this poem further on, however, I would like to point out the image of ashes as a figure of concentration, of that which remains. In *Primera muerte de María* we read:

Y cuando ya no le bastaba su piel, la forma de sus nalgas o sus senos, el olor y el sabor de su vagina y de sus labios, cuando ya todo su aspecto exterior, hasta la luz de sus pupilas, la expresión de su rostro, habían sido gozados hubiera querido adorar sus intestinos, abrazar y besar sus riñones, su hígado, su corazón, sus pulmones. Jugar con sus excrementos, calmarse la sed con su orina, apoderarse de sus latidos, de su respiración, de su alma.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, pp. 160-163.

²⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Striptease', in *Barthes: Selected Writings*, ed. with intro. by Susan Sontag ([New York]: Fontana, 1983), pp. 85-88 (p. 85).

²⁶⁷ *PMM*, pp. 57-58.

The key in that paragraph is the word 'exterior'. It outlines a barrier that he wished he could cross. It would have been a different type of novel if he did. That he did not emphasises the idea of a latent centre, a mysterious space to which he does not have access. He can only communicate through her exteriority but he is aware of that interiority beyond his reach. The exploration of the lover's physical interiority would point to a passion beyond the exterior, beyond the appearance to the simplicity of biological existence. It is the continuation of undressing. Going beyond the exterior layer of the skin is not an alien theme in Eielson's work.

One issue that lies underneath this concept of transitivity is that a character's individuality and identity resists inflexible definitions or compartmentalisations. The striptease has in this case a paradoxical effect where the more exposed she is the closer she is to the person she had become in intimacy with her lovers. I believe that in the work of Eielson beyond questions about identity—an issue that has been well documented and analysed²⁶⁸—lie those questions regarding existence: the raw existential fact of our presence in the world. Beyond or before questions and issues about culture and history lies this undeniable fact: we exist, we have a presence in the world. We share the fact of our existence with all other beings. As is clear from the novel *Primera muerte de María* in a person there is something connected to the secret of existence. This approximation to the mystery seems to be a focal point of the interesting underwater scene where Pedro imagines one of the sunken Spanish galleons just off the coast. Pedro feels that he 'casi podía tocar la nave dorada, con su preciosa carga, su misterioso tesoro al alcance de la mano.'²⁶⁹ The mystery cannot be touched. Transposing this image to the sphere of language, language will remain external to the experience just as Pedro is external to the galleon. I think that this is one

²⁶⁸ Rebaza Soralez, *La construcción de un artista peruano contemporáneo*, pp. 144-151, 191-238.

²⁶⁹ *PMM*, p. 22.

of the practical reasons for Eielson's use of diverse artistic languages, because the 'mystery' would then be approached from different realities, different angles which would try to express from their particular artistic possibilities.

Primera muerte de María is a complex narrative of which I have only approached a particular aspect within a specific context. It is not possible to go on any further since the point of my analysis is not the novel as a whole but the undressing theme in it. I will move back to *Acto final* to continue the analysis of other instances of undressing that take place in it. There are two instances that should be commented upon. They are similar because both are groups of people take off their clothes, Charlie and his assistants and the 'Hombres Violeta'. Here is how these instances are described in the play:

Charlie exige silencio. Se quita la chaqueta con parsimonia. Luego la corbata, los tirantes, la camisa. (Se oye un redoble de tambores, como en el circo. La cámara sigue rodando la escena). Comienza a desabotonarse el pantalón. A su alrededor los pordioseros gritan y se estrechan más y más. Por fin se avientan sobre él y sus ayudantes y les arrancan el vestido.²⁷⁰

And the 'Hombres Violeta', 'imitando a lady Ciclotrón [...] empiezan a quitarse la ropa.'²⁷¹ The main difference is, of course, the number; the representation of the individual, in lady Ciclotrón and Charlie, and that of the people in the assistants and the 'Hombres Violeta'. These last ones as they take off their purple capes emerge dressed as working class citizens. In this last instance the outer layer that was homogenising the people gives way to a group formed by individuals who ultimately go off playfully towards the sea. On the other hand Charlie and his assistants hide under the bed. The reactions of these two groups are different. One is

²⁷⁰ Eielson, *Acto Final*, p. 458.

²⁷¹ Eielson, *Acto Final*, p. 459.

contracting, hiding under the bed; the other is expanding, running towards the sea. If we think about the different characters that compose each group, and if we think back to the novel in order to understand who they are, the conclusion that presents itself is that there is a connection between the socio-economic class and the reaction to nudity. Charlie is rich, in the novel he lives in an elegant building, and in the play he has assistants. The 'Hombres Violeta' turn out to be working class people. They move from the homogenising purple capes to more specific costumes. Although the socio-economic conclusion is the first that comes to mind, at the moment I would like to stress more the pattern of nudity in Eielson's play than the reasons for these last two instances. I am more interested in the characters that run towards the sea. As Eielson pointed out, the sea was for him a space of freedom. In this sense we could infer that their nakedness is related to swimming in the sea. This would immediately connect with Pedro's suicide: a going back to the origin. There is a playful tone in the invitation to the public to get undressed like them. I think that for the final group nakedness and their going off into the sea is a movement towards the open, the exteriority that the beach and the sea imply.

The transit between clothing and nudity in the work of Eielson implies a complex idea of distance. Besides finding glimpses of this hidden element in his poetry we could trace a dialectical relationship between the *Paisajes infinitos de la cosa del Perú* and the *quipus*. On the one hand, there is the *Paisajes infinitos*, where even the name points to openness; on the other, the *quipus* are a concentration of mass. In the twisted textiles the viewer finds the image itself of the compression of distance in works such as *Quipus 15 AZ-1* (see. fig. 10). In the first of these works the knotted fabric is close to the top edge of the frame. On one side the canvas is extended going up towards the vortex formed by the knot and on the other side comes down in a braid-like pattern. The knot is the symbol of unification between the two extremes and the

highest point of tension. The knot in this case functions as a unifier of distances. Both series of works, under this perspective, would respond to a dialectic dynamism between expansion—the *Paisajes infinitos*—and contraction—the *quipus*.

In this section I have moved from the concept of *in between* represented by undressing to the concept of distance. They are closely related. The *in between* is not static, it is always a movement from a previous point towards the next. But these points are in themselves spaces *in between*. This category is brought forth by constant movement, by a way of being in the world that is always becoming. As Heidegger would understand the nature of *Dasein*, not as a consolidated existence but as always becoming what it is:

Dasein or existence therefore means we not only exist, but we perceive also that we exist. And we are never finished like something that exists, we cannot walk around ourselves; at each point we are open for a future. We must *lead* our lives. We are charged with ourselves. We are what we become.²⁷²

This becoming is part of its nature, it cannot stop. I believe that something similar is the case in the work of Eielson. I presented this in the dynamism of Eielson's use of different media. This is not to say that individual works do not have a discernible meaning on their own. However, it is within the larger context of Eielson's work that the reader can comprehend the implications of the individual works within the artist's vision. *Acto final* and *Primera muerte de María*, the *Paisajes infinitos* and the *quipus* are complementary—not to themselves but in their apparently different expressions of the reality which Eielson was trying to express and understand.

²⁷² Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. by Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 150.

3. CONNECTIONS

In the previous section I explored the significance of the progression between clothing and nudity. I did this by analysing the concepts of transit and of existence as an *in between* state. I closed the previous section with an indication to the idea of distance. This is one of the two issues that will analyse during the present section. First will be the role of the skin as another *in between* area. This will prove consequential for the next issue in this section: the connection between elements that are brought together by a word, image or concept. The *in between* implies conceptual and spatial connections that underline the significance of art and language to the understanding of man's place in the cosmos. The section is divided in two areas: first I will explore the concept of skin as the space *in between* that demarcates existence and thus a relationship with the realities on both sides of the dividing line; second, the poet's conception of the order of things within space. By the exploration of these connections it will be further shown that Eielson's poetics are embedded in a preoccupation with the presence of the work of art in the world.

In this first part of the section I will analyse the role of the skin within the poetical conception of place-in-the-world in Eielson's poetics. I will introduce the idea of perception as a constant communication with what lies outside the individual and which has a direct impact on the order of things within a particular space: 'si se coloca un objeto en una imagen no es solamente una cuestión de forma, es una cuestión mucho más sutil, que afecta las relaciones de las cosas con el aire [i.e. space], de las cosas con el mundo.'²⁷³ In his poem 'Cuerpo multiplicado' (p. 198) from *Noche oscura del cuerpo* Eielson writes:

No tengo límites

²⁷³ Aldo Tassone, 'Michelangelo Antonioni: la historia del cine la hacen las películas', in *Para mí hacer una película es vivir*, ed. and trans. by Josep Torrell (Barcelona: Paidós, 2002), pp. 249-275 (p. 272).

Mi piel es una puerta abierta
 Y mi cerebro una casa vacía
 La punta de mis dedos toca fácilmente
 El firmamento y el piso de Madera
 No tengo pies ni cabeza
 Mis brazos y mis piernas
 Son los brazos y las piernas
 De un animal que estornuda
 Y que no tiene límites
 Si gozo somos todos que gozamos
 [...]

Soy uno solo como todos y como todos
 Soy uno sólo

The openness and emptiness of the lines 'mi piel es una puerta abierta/ Y mi cerebro una casa vacía' indicates a willingness to experience existence free of pre-conceived notions. It is, in a way, a clearing out in order to approximate a more direct experience of being in the world. This emptiness is, according to Zen, the principle for a true experience of existence, since 'the true existence [...] comes from emptiness.'²⁷⁴ The images in the poem are not of closed empty geometrical objects but of open spaces in constant communication with other adjacent ones. Not having limits does not, I believe, refer to an ego that could conquer all challenges but rather, as William Rowe writes, to an absence of an ego in the traditional sense.²⁷⁵ This emptiness is contrary to an idea of accumulation and ownership; whether this refers to material goods, moments lived or knowledge. This would be opposite to Eielson's attitude, whose openness and emptiness invites a constant communication with the world and thus an exchange between the world

²⁷⁴ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, ed. by Trudy Dixon, intro. by Richard Smith, rev. edn (New York: Weatherhill, 1999; repr. 2001), p. 113.

²⁷⁵ William Rowe, 'Jorge Eduardo Eielson: The Boundaries of the Poem', in *Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and the Inner Life*, Oxford Hispanic Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 198-223 (p. 209).

and the poet. Therefore, what is important to emphasise in these lines is perception. However, perception is here understood as an active engagement with the environment and not only as a passive state of reception; that is, perception as a process for which the end is not accumulation but the process itself.

Claudia Benthien explains that since early modernity in Western thought there have prevailed two distinct views regarding the relationship between the skin and the individual. The first view considers that 'the skin encloses the self: [the] skin is imagined as a protective and sheltering cover.'²⁷⁶ This implies that 'what is important lies beneath the skin, is hidden inside the body. It escapes our gaze'.²⁷⁷ Thus, in order to approach it or know it there must be an interpretation of this interiority. Its secrets must be unlocked. This is an internal existence. Since the self is what is supposed to be protected inside the skin, this implies a separation between the self and the body. The second view 'equates the skin with the subject, the person: here the essence does not lie beneath the skin, hidden inside. Rather, it is the skin itself, which stands metonymically for the whole human being.'²⁷⁸ This is an external existence; one based on perception and accumulation of experiences acquired in the relationship between the subject and the world. The first view focuses on depth, the hidden and protected self; the second one focuses on surface, the relationship between the exterior of the body and the exteriorities of other bodies in the world. The key here being not the extremes but the possible communication between the external and the internal, between exteriority and interiority, as Paul Valéry wrote: 'ce qu'il y a de plus profond dans l'homme, c'est la peau.'²⁷⁹ Valéry's phrase reveals the paradox, the outermost layer of our bodies is that with which we reveal our interiority. It is worth remembering what Ortega y Gasset

²⁷⁶ Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World*, trans. by Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 17.

²⁷⁷ Benthien, *Skin*, p. 17.

²⁷⁸ Benthien, *Skin*, p. 17.

²⁷⁹ Paul Valéry, *L'idée fixe*, 43rd edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), p. 49.

writes that about this, and to which I had already referred to in the previous chapter: 'el gesto y la fisonomía [...] por lo mismo que son impremeditados, dejan escapar noticias del secreto profundo y normalmente lo reflejan con exactitud.'²⁸⁰ The exterior layer, the skin, is the connection between interiority and the outer world. In a way it is its form, its presence in the world. In a sense, the skin can be understood as a space *in between*; not, however, a kind of no-man's land but rather a plexus where different spaces conjoin. It is within this context that the full implications of the skin as an open door in Eielson's poem become evident. We find a clue to this at the beginning and closing of his poem: 'no tengo límites [...] soy uno solo como todos y como todos/ soy uno sólo.' These lines signify the overflow of an existence that cannot be contained within socially prescribed limits. The metaphorical crossing of limits between an individual and the rest of the community creates the feeling of loneliness: 'soy uno solo'.

However, the skin is a meeting place, a plexus, as I have said, where both the internal existence of the person and the exterior existence of the world meet to nourish and transform each other. Michel Serres thinks of the skin as the meeting place of all the senses:

Les organes des sens varient étrangement la peau, elle-même variable fondamentale, *sensorium commune*: sens commun à tous les sens, faisant lien, pont, passage entre eux, plaine banale, mitoyenne, collective, partagée.²⁸¹

The skin is the unifying factor, the element that facilitates the communication between the internal and external elements, sharing both. Steven Connor writes that Serres is considering sensory experience from an Epicurean perspective where 'the senses, [work] through being touched by simulacra, the fragile films of atoms which are stripped off

²⁸⁰ Ortega y Gasset, 'La elección en amor', p. 594.

²⁸¹ Michel Serres, *Les cinq sens: philosophie des corps mêlés -1* (Paris: Grasset, 1985), p. 71.

bodies and fly to other bodies.²⁸² The implied constant exchange between these simulacra and the internal world of the author can be linked to what William Rowe writes: that in Eielson's poems 'the relation with the environment, which is above all visual-tactile, does not take the form of self against world, but of frontiers that dissolve and rematerialize, in unforeseen ways.'²⁸³ The physical limits are called into question in poems like 'Ceremonia solitaria en compañía de tu cuerpo' were we read:

Entro y salgo de tu cuerpo
Como si fuera un espejo
Atravieso pelos y quejidos
No sé cuál es tu piel y cuál la mía
Cuál mi esqueleto y cuál el tuyo (p. 251)

Following William Rowe, I believe that the significant factor lies in the communication between the self and world, the contamination between both spaces—individual and world—which paradoxically maintains the individual space of self-recognition while also accepting its temporality. Eielson plays with the physiologically innermost part of the body and well as with its surface. The confusion between the bodies signals a momentary fading of individualities. This momentary confusion would seem to dissolve the agents but ultimately points to the fact of being an individual isolated existence, the two previous lines in the poem read 'luego con mi soledad/ con mis huesos con mi glándula/ entro y salgo de tu cuerpo'. This poem forms part of the book entitled *Ceremonia solitaria*, where we find an overarching feeling of failure in the communion/communication with others. In this book we find two emblematic images: the poet in front of a mirror and onanism. Both of these images, I believe, are the counterparts of that communion. They illuminate a complementary aspect to what is under discussion but I will

²⁸² Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), p. 28.

²⁸³ Rowe, 'Introduction', in *Poets of Contemporary Latin America*, pp. 1-28 (p. 25).

not be analysing them at depth at this point. Onanism and self-contemplation in the mirror are signals to the impossibility of true transcendence, of going beyond the self. It also signals a recrimination against false hopes: 'sin darse cuenta que la entrada y la salida/ nunca han existido' ('Ceremonia solitaria bajo la luz de la luna', p. 240). These images also suggest desire and an explosive passion for existence. In the poem just quoted Eielson compares writing and masturbation. Both of these are solitary expressions which can be interpreted as a search for communion; one with an absent lover, the other with an absent reader. The skin is a false boundary; instead of keeping itself as a barrier which the world cannot cross it is an access through which the world and the poet nourish each other. The communication—and contamination—between the world and the poet is ongoing. These concepts are implied in the poem in the absence of limits. If we think of existence as a permeable membrane which would have a form but will constantly be penetrated by the elements in its environment as much as releasing its proper elements back into the environment, we can read the following lines from 'Cuerpo multiplicado' as a metaphor for communication:

Mis brazos y mis piernas
Son los brazos y las piernas
De un animal que estornuda
Y que no tiene límites
Si gozo somos todos que gozamos
Aunque no todos gocen
Si lloro somos todos que lloramos
Aunque no todos lloren
[...]
La misma película en colores
En la misma sala oscura
Que me reúne y me separa de todos

Eielson here is condensing his existence to the basic elements he shares with everyone else; his existence before the particularities of culture, history, etc. As I will show later he uses this motif in other poems to signify bare existence. In adopting this condensation he can then go on to create a sense of solidarity with the existence of others. For this he presents the image of the film theatre in which other viewers and himself are surrounded and thus unified by darkness in a shared space: 'la misma sala oscura/ Que me reúne y me separa de todos'. That he concentrates on the film being screened is to a point secondary. What I think is significant for the idea of communication is that Eielson emphasises the proximity to others, even though they all are probably looking towards the projection screen. Eielson is suggesting that the sense of sight is not the only or the dominating one through which a person can recognise the existence of others. The sense of sight has particular dominance in Western modern culture. Images are invested with an aura of credibility and realism not granted to the other senses. Our environments and culture have been constructed and developed mainly according to this sense:

The images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a *partial* way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation. The tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 12.

The viewers in Eielson's film theatre are probably looking at the colour images being projected but he feels a sense of proximity and solidarity with them through the shared space of the darkened theatre. His presence and their presence become part of the space and in this sense it is transformed by their existence. The shared space becomes as the skin a plexus where presences conjoin, because he is not basing his experience of the world solely on the images perceived by his sense of sight, but by his whole being. As William Blake wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

The whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do [...] melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.²⁸⁵

Eielson is using the skin as the unifying metaphor of his senses; but also as a metaphor signifying an opening up his whole body for perception. This openness creates a feeling of belonging—being open—to a larger context with which there is ongoing and unrestricted communication. Eielson is challenging the Cartesian conception of spatial order: 'no tengo pies ni cabeza'. Next to the references to limitlessness and the darkness of the theatre this line suggests that the way things are perceived and experienced does not follow a linear and logical

²⁸⁵ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 81-102 (p. 93).

progression; that they are not organised and processed as subsequent links on a chain. On the contrary, it suggests the possibility of simultaneity. That experiences and perceptions do not follow a logical order. By underlining his skin as a one of the main organs of perception, what is all around him is free to become part of his experience without having to be adjusted to visual categories. Eielson is showing an awareness and a willingness of be part of something larger than himself. This is what William Rowe writes about when commenting on 'Cuerpo multiplicado':

Rather than a project to conquer new spaces, which would ultimately only lead to existing limitations being replaced with new ones, Eielson's is an attitude, or better said an action, of experimentation which rejects the boundaries that make the human soul an inner reality.²⁸⁶

To challenge the limits that would make the soul an inner reality does not mean to conceive the soul as an exteriority, but rather a metaphorical lifting of the barriers for a continual and constant communication between the individual and the world.

This communication/contamination is clearly exemplified by the figure of the knot in Eielson's work:

The knot suggests the perplexity of an interaction with oneself: it passes back over itself, above and beneath. The forces of the knot are made manifest in interlacing forms.²⁸⁷

In the figure of the knot the fabric that forms it is at times internal and at other times external. The inside of the knot is inaccessible to the

²⁸⁶ Rowe, 'The Boundaries of the Poem', p. 209.

²⁸⁷ Verner and Boi, 'Bridging the Gap between Art, Science and Nature: the Visionary Work of Jorge Eduardo Eielson on Knots', in *Nu/do*, pp. 117-146 (p. 138).

naked eye but its exterior suggests the inner workings of its composition since the visible part of the thread plunges into the core of the knot and resurfaces again at a different point: 'la metáfora de la red, al igual que la del nudo (y, evidentemente, no hay red sin nudos), es también la metáfora de la existencia.'²⁸⁸ It is a possible metaphor for existence because the knot is formed by close and constant contact between its interiority and the exteriority from where it is perceived. In this way the skin as an open door is a metaphor for a person's perception of the environment which he inhabits. Such openness manifests an uninterrupted communication between an individual and the environment without ignoring that an individual is indeed demarcated by physical limits. Indeed, this openness questions the accepted rules of perception and the organisation of space. As Aldous Huxley writes in his essay *The Doors of Perception*:

The really important facts were that spatial relationships had ceased to matter very much and that my mind was perceiving the world in terms other than spatial categories. At ordinary times the eye concerns itself with such problems as *Where?—How far?—How situated in relation to what?* In the mescaline experience the implied questions to which the eye responds are of another order. Place and distance cease to be of much interest. The mind does its perceiving in terms of intensity of experience, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern.²⁸⁹

What I would like to highlight is the alternative perception of objects, particularly the reference to 'relationships within a pattern'. What is questioned here is the order in which Huxley perceived reality, and in this sense there is a similar challenge in Eielson. This idea of perception can be linked to the metaphor of the net because in a knot the Cartesian

²⁸⁸ Eielson, 'La escalera infinita', in *Arte poética*, pp. 589-596 (p. 591).

²⁸⁹ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 9.

cooridantes system is useless. Another image I have used is the plexus, a closely-bound network of nerves. These images point to a different organisation, a different conceptualisation of relationships among objects.

The relationships among things become a prominent feature in the book of poems *Habitación en Roma*. This relationship is made manifest whether things are taking place inside or outside. These localisations are linked with the metaphor of the knot in the sense of tightly bound interconnections between objects in the world. For example, in the poem that opens the book 'Elegía blasfema para los que viven en el barrio de San Pedro y no tienen qué comer' (pp. 125-127) the third line reads 'detrás de esa pared tan blanca'. This is a clear localisation. The wall separates the inhabitants of San Pedro from the rest of the Romans. To open the book with a social issue demarcated by the wall emphasises a concrete worldly reality that was absent from his previous poetic work. It also signals Eielson's concerns about the ghettoising and the division of classes in the urban setting expressed by spatial references. The title of the book itself, *Habitación en Roma*, raises questions as to the locus of his existence both geographically and existentially. The title implies a double space, the poet's existence within a room which is located within the geographical space of the Italian capital city. Already in the title a pattern of spaces emerges, a connection of spaces within spaces:

¿en dónde está mi doble
palpitante y escondido
mi corazón encogido
y su quejido?
¿en dónde está
en dónde está
mi corazón
[...]
el corazón

de esta ciudad que es tu cuerpo
y es el mío
nuestro cuerpo
nuestro río
nuestra iglesia
y nuestro abismo? ('Azul ultramar', pp. 142-143)

The poet moves from the centre of his body to the centre of the city portrayed by the river Tiber. The centre of the city—the river—is not fixed. It is in a constant flux, a constant process of becoming. The river is a centre that runs and that is never the same without ever ceasing being the river Tiber. The spatiality of this poem is created by the increasing number and volume of existences in relation to one another: the poet and his heart, the poet and his lover, the poet and his room, the room within a neighbourhood and within a city. This in turn creates a feeling of belonging, of having a concrete existence within a larger pattern. Like the river, the different actors and spaces are constantly flowing through time. These are no isolated concentric circles. With the images of open doors and windows, the sensory organs and bodily functions Eielson aims to suggest a continuous flux: the constant passing of one thing into another, and thus asserting that the real state of existence is transitivity. This spills over the territory regarding the certitude of individuality and identity since our own physical body is constantly replacing its cells to the extent that it is widely believed that all the cells in the body are replaced every seven years. This observation indicates that man's physical existence is in a constant state of flux, that what we consider most constant in our lifetimes is also transitional. Eielson seems to have intuited this transitivity. The images of small particles in his mind and of cells in his faeces in the poem 'Cuerpo vestido' creates the image of flux in organic processes. This flux in Eielson signals a connection to the universe since the particles that enter his body and the particles that exit

from it go on to be part of the earth in the never ending cycle of existence.

I believe that the connection to the universe is also portrayed as a single vertical line coming down from the sky. A conjunction between the metaphors of the body and this vertical line—also present in 'Cuerpo vestido'—is found in the poem 'Ceremonia solitaria con cascabeles y naftalina' (p. 239). In this poem Eielson creates an unprecedented image in which this conjunction—the body, the line—is presented in a condensed form:

Como una esfera de piel humana
Pero con un solo ojo
Para mirar el cielo y el otro
Para defecar

The vertical line is suggested by the eyes. One looks to the stars, the other one down to earth. The vertical crosses the centre of the sphere perceiving—I suppose—first the view from the sky and then crossing downwards into the earth. I find here a gesture towards the visual poem 'Esta vertical celeste proviene de alfa centauro', where a single vertical line comes down from the top centre of the page and stops a short distance into its lower half.²⁹⁰ The text—'esta vertical celeste proviene de alfa centauro'—is set in conventional typewriter font in a single centred horizontal line placed on the bottom of the page. Visually I believe it can be linked to Barnett Newman's canvases of the late 1940s and the early 50s in which individual vertical lines cross the canvas from top to bottom, for example *Onement I* (fig. 11). According to John Golding in a symbolical reading of these canvases, and in particular of *Onement I*, the line signifies the ray of divine light that created the primeval man.²⁹¹ The single strip of paint unites the Hidden God of the

²⁹⁰ Eielson, *Arte poética*, p. 615.

²⁹¹ John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 195-197.

Kabbalah and the primeval space of creation. The line signifies the connection with the transcendent.²⁹² The single line in Eielson's visual poem crosses sidereal space from Alpha Centauri down into the space of the page uniting them and indicating a connection between man and the stars. This connection is not unusual in Eielson, in 'Cuerpo multiplicado' we read 'y si fumo un cigarillo/ el humo llega a las estrellas'. It is with these types of gestures that Eielson localises himself—and man—in the cosmos.

In 1969 Eielson proposed to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration the placing of an art object on the moon entitled *Lunar tension*.²⁹³ As this project testifies, he sought to create a more concrete link between the sky and the earth.²⁹⁴ This project is another line that can be traced down to the earth where it connects with the series *Esculturas subterráneas*. These were a series of conceptual works to be placed underground at different locations around the world between 1965 and 1969. Each sculpture was accompanied by a text explaining its particular conception, production, etc.²⁹⁵

Hoy día—una espléndida jornada de primavera, hacia el atardecer—he colocado mi primera escultura subterránea en el Monte Palatino, justo al frente de mi casa. La escultura es un gigantesco alteta de mármol en cuyo pecho arde una lámpara de aceite. [...] y ha sido colocada a 4 metros de profundidad.²⁹⁶

These 'sculptures' maintain the vertical line coming down from the sky burying it into the earth, uniting them. I see the same impulse in this project as in *Lunar tension*. The intended space of both projects is the

²⁹² Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, p. 197.

²⁹³ Eielson, *Arte poética*, p. 650.

²⁹⁴ Jorge Fernández Granados, 'La arqueología celeste de Jorge Eduardo Eielson', in *Espéculo: Revista de estudios literarios de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, 28 <www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero28/arqueolo.html> [accessed 31 August 2006]

²⁹⁵ Eielson, *Arte poética*, pp. 629-635; Luis Rebaza Soraluz, *Arte poética*, fnn., p. 629.

²⁹⁶ Eielson 'Esculturas subterráneas', in *Un/do*, pp.114-116 (p. 114)

larger celestial and geographical bodies. These are not sculptures to be admired in galleries but conceptual sculptures buried in the earth and placed on the moon. It becomes clear that beyond the particular conceptions of each individual 'sculpture' there is an intention to create a link. And between outer space and the earth stands man. Gaston Bachelard quotes Czeslaw Milosz:

As I stood in contemplation of the garden of the wonders of space, [...] I had the feeling that I was looking into the ultimate depths, the most secret regions of my own being [...] all these constellations are yours, they exist in you; outside your love they have no reality!²⁹⁷

These sculptures serve the purpose of presenting different material realities disconnected in time and space but linked through the imagination.

I think that Eielson's projects—*Lunar tension* and *Esculturas subterráneas*—can be read from a similar impulse to bring the elements implied in them into the reality of man. That is, not as external astronomic and geological realities but as part of man's existence, part of his life; a gesture not so much of appropriation as can be deduced in Milosz's thought but of recognition. This vertical line present in his visual/conceptual work and in his poetry can also be linked with the quipus, especially to those knotted canvases stretched over a frame in one corner thus tensing the canvas leading to or from the knot or vortex. The tense canvas would represent the line to or from the vortex or knot: 'the spatial compression involved in the knot has the effect of an implosion: the folds, the pleated canvas of the quipus or even the twisted portion of the canvas, plunge into the knot.'²⁹⁸ An interpretative

²⁹⁷ Quoted in *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas, foreword by John R. Stilgoe (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1994), p. 189.

²⁹⁸ Verner and Boi, 'Bridging the Gap between Art, Science and Nature: the Visionary Work of Jorge Eduardo Eielson on Knots', in *Nu/do*, pp. 117-146 (p. 138).

connection between the knot and the vertical line would be to compare the knot with the artist's imagination where the lines created between existences become a vortex out of which stems the work.

In the poems, the line coming down from Alpha Centauri penetrates the single eye that looks up to heaven, follows the vertical line of the erect human body sketched in 'Cuerpo vestido' and it travels down into the earth out of the eye-anus. This bizarre image of the eye-anus could signal an active role of contemplation upon the work that is being buried into the earth. The line coming from the stars, crossing the body, and continuing into the earth in an act of expulsion/vision of residue in the act of defecation that signals the flux of existence actively shaping and uniting the cosmos.

These images of connection between spaces are also found in another two ways: one is the depiction of the inner body, such as glands and intestines; the second would be images of defecation. The image of the intestines is present in several poems, for example 'Primavera de fuego y ceniza en el cine Rex de Roma' (pp. 242-245), where we read: 'quiero tan sólo conocer mis intestinos/ escondidos como peces/ entre mi corazón y el páncreas amarillo' (p. 242). In these images the presentation of the corporeal reality stresses the connection between physical spaces: the moon, the earth, Alpha Centuari, Rome, the body. To want to know his own internal space is consistent with the intention to place art objects in locations beyond his reach. Through his creative imagination lines between objects and spaces are drawn and through these lines objects and spaces are connected. The shape that this forms is that of a net, Eielson's metaphor for existence. The intestines are also evoked in eschatological imagery, and in terms of shape are comparable with the quipus. The act of defecation unites the poet's physicality with the earth, a receptacle/origin of life:

Cuando el momento llega y llega
 Cada día el momento de sentarse humildemente
 A defecar y una parte inútil de nosotros
 Vuelve a la tierra
 Todo parece más sencillo y más cercano
 [...]

Los intestinos vuelven al abismo azul
 En donde yacen los caballos
 Y el tambor de nuestra infancia ('Último cuerpo', p. 200)

The act of defecation depicted in this poem is overtly related to the connection between existence and the earth. The earth that receives a part of us is also where the past is to be found in the form of the toys he buried. It becomes clear that these connections extend into time. The toys are part of his history, like the cells are part of his body.

The constant reference in the poems to entering and exiting render relative the concepts of inside and outside, interior and exterior and shifts the focus to the versatility of the creative imagination to move between these spaces: 'la punta de mis dedos toca fácilmente/ El firmamento y el piso de madera' (p. 198). The element of distance in this image is latent in Eielson's work and it becomes explicit in poems like: 'Cuando en la noche deseo tocar la luna/ Toco la luna de mis anteojos negros' (p. 231). Distance is circumvented by a physical substitute, the frame of his glasses for the celestial body. But this substitution is made possible because of language, which in itself is already a substitution. This movement through substitutions mimics the internal/external dynamics in the replacement, twisting, and changing of a usual internal space into an exteriority. The homonyms 'luna'—celestial body—and 'luna'—frame of glasses—make the substitution possible at the level of the imagination. It is possible to see in this poem an example of the problem of substitution that Eielson sees in language and not in his visual work. There the *thing*

created is not a substitution but a thing in itself. Although this can be a metaphor or a symbol, its physical reality is undeniable. This is what I see in the efforts of the Concrete poets, a recreation of the poetic object into a real object that still shares the characteristics of a printed poem but that also shares the concrete reality—presence—of a work of art. In Eielson's work this shared and ambiguous space is present in *Canto visible* where we find, among other, a white rectangle containing a drawing of a chair that reads: 'esta silla de madera/ es de papel' (fig. 12).²⁹⁹ These visual poems are stressing the differences between language and the concrete existence of things. However, there is a progress through stages in Eielson's work from the different levels of language to the conceptual and plastic work.

There is in these connections between things a sense of movement. In 'Cuerpo vestido' there is a progress *inside*: from clothing, to glands and tissue to proteins and cells. It is as if they were all stages of one same body. And at the centre of the poem we read:

Hay millares de luceros
En mis sienes
Y de células oscuras
En mis heces

This draws a vertical line from the brain to the anus passing through the centre of the body in a vertical descending movement. This vertical line is also reminiscent of the line created by the seven chakras according to the Hindu tradition. According to this tradition there are seven energy points in the human body which run from the top of the head to the perineum. This is relevant here because these energy points also function according to Hinduism as connections between the body, the earth and the metaphysical. So far I have not found any evidence

²⁹⁹ Eielson, *Arte poética*, p. 619.

that would connect Eielson's thought to Hinduism. However, I think that the chakras and the vertical line outlined by Eielson share some characteristics of which the connection between the three aforementioned elements is relevant for the present discussion. There is a definitive connection between the physiological necessities and the earth which in the poem 'Ultimo cuerpo' also symbolises a connection with personal history. In the essay Luis Fernando Chueca dedicated to Eielson's use of eschatological imagery he points to a cyclical relationship between man and the earth as a possible interpretation of these images in the poetry: 'las heces suponen un puente entre hombre y tierra, entre espacio cósmico y especie humana [...] la regeneración y la prolongación de la vida.'³⁰⁰ And he quotes Octavio Paz who writes that excrement is at one time life and death: "es un desecho que es también abono natural: muerte que da vida".³⁰¹ For Eielson this cyclical relationship with the cosmos includes clothing as one more stratum of existence

Lo excrementicio, entonces, resulta lo más puro, lo más auténtico y real; la miseria material de los pobres y marginales, la abismada soledad en la que viven, es la que redime. El hablante, entonces, cuestiona, incluso su escritura ("cómo puedo yo escribir") [...] Eielson denuncia la deshumanización de la vida que, entre otras cosas, se manifiesta en la marginalidad innegable de los excrementos que pueblan las calles (donde "vocifera la mierda"); pero, al mismo tiempo, anuncia que es allí, donde se encuentran algunos de los pocos "destellos gloriosos" que aún existen.³⁰²

Chueca joins the dimension of possibility with the marginality of poverty. The realistic proximity of decay and dirtiness is an acceptance of

³⁰⁰ Luis Fernando Chueca, 'El discurso escatológico sobre el cuerpo en la poesía de J. E. Eielson', in *Nu/do*, pp. 163-176 (p. 173).

³⁰¹ Quoted in Chueca, 'El discurso escatológico', p. 169. In another poem Eielson writes: 'Así la rosa y la basura/ Son la misma cosa/ Porque hoy día son basura/ Y mañana rosa' (p. 397).

³⁰² Chueca, 'El discurso escatológico', pp. 172-173.

the passing of time and the organic reality of human beings. It is thus an approximation to nature—to the naked body—which the poet considers more real than the collective life of the city that hinders the potential for intimacy. Even though the clothes are soiled they have the smell of fresh marble, and even though the avenues are a symbol of the modern city and of progress they smell of stale, dirty clothes. The difference in the smells resides in its production. The avenues are alienating, a place where a person becomes flat, faceless, and lost. This differs from the smell produced by a person's life; his everyday activity, his habits and particular odour. In a kind of roundabout manner, we have here a glimpse of clothing as a trace of existence. It is not the clothes that 'signal' something that the person wants to express about himself. It is the clothes themselves which have become *impregnated* with the wearer's life.

As the title of this section suggests, I have tried to explore the connections that Eielson implicitly draws in his work. These connections recreate, as I have already pointed out, the metaphor of the net that for Eielson referred to existence. It becomes clear that Eielson sees his presence in the world as one of an infinite series of knots which unite the cosmos and give it significance. Whether the presence of a work be conceptual or physical, there is an underlying emotion that binds things together. This is the appropriation, the personalisation of space.

I have concentrated here on the connection between the poet, beginning from the skin, with the surrounding cosmos. It is not only that the poet comprehends reality, but also that he shares with the rest of objects the reality of existence. It is this fact that creates a connection and the work of art is intended to become another object that can also have a presence in the world.

4. FRAGMENTS

In the last section I sought the connections created by Eielson through which he created a unity with the cosmos. In the present section I will explore this idea further but this time going inwards into the poet's body. I will do this by analysing some of Eielson's use of imagery in his poetry. These images imply an internal space that although located within the body is not necessarily physical. I believe that there is a link between this internal space and intimacy. Also related to these images there is a search. Since this space is ineffable there are different attempts to approach it. This is done by searching within the body.

Eielson in the poem 'Elegía' (p. 271) speaks of a communion, not of people but of essences. In this poem intimacy is given a physical existence. What remains of the internal fire are the ashes that still desire each other, this is an image of intimacy. The poem follows the argumentative structure of mystical/theological principle of the *via negativa* which searches for Divinity through the negations of the things and concepts which could be applied to it and to which Divinity cannot be reduced.³⁰³ In Eielson's transcendentalism—by this I simply mean reaching beyond the individual—this *negative way* is seeking the experience of a shared intimacy where the intimate depths of one person fuses with the most profound in another. An experience that would allow the conditions of a further experience of communion since what this shared intimacy implies is the communication between the individuals' intimacies. The religious references in Eielson's texts contextualise this aspect of his thought within the mystical tradition. His references to San Juan de la Cruz in the title *Noche oscura del cuerpo* and the use of an epigraph by Anaxagoras to open the poem 'Escultura de palabras para una plaza de Roma' (p. 169) can be interpreted as a particular way to relate to experiences in which language is an approximation, and where

³⁰³ A concise version of this theological thought can be found in the fifth chapter of the Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. and trans. by Colm Luibheid and others (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 141.

there is no ultimate certainty in knowledge. 'Elegía' (pp. 271-272) is structured as a chain of negations:

No es el pájaro salado [...]
Ni el desierto que se anida [...]
No es la luna que se asoma [...]
No es el dolor de cabeza [...]
Ni mi sexo que padece [...]
No es la glándula que llora [...]

As in the *via negativa*, the poem's structure progresses through the invalidation of different possibilities that would explain the poet's situation. There cannot be any affirmations because whatever is needed to be explained cannot be compared to anything that exists. In the chain of negative propositions of this poem everything seems to be cancelled, even the body. But what remains is desire. The poem closes:

No es amarnos todavía
Sin pantalón ni sonrisa
Sin corazón ni vestido
Casi sin carne y hueso
No es la luna que regresa
Ni tu desnudez que pasa
Como el viento en el estío
Es tan sólo mi ceniza
Que desea tu ceniza (p. 272)

The image of the ashes is one of concentration. He seeks what is enduring, beyond the individual 'ni tu desnudez que pasa'. But that essence which lives in the individual 'es tan sólo *mi* ceniza'. These material remains are almost incorporeal. It melts between the fingers

into an almost imperceptible dust. This indicates the subtle nature of what Eielson is after, the almost non-physical existence of what remains after the purification of fire: 'fire is seen as a process which can be destructive but also purifying.'³⁰⁴ The ashes are a symbol of death. But death understood as the purification of life, the negation of the physical reality that bounds existence in a singular isolated body. In Eielson's poem the fire destroys the body but keeps still a delicate physical presence, as in Quevedo's sonnet:

su cuerpo dejará, no su cuidado;
 serán ceniza, mas tendrá sentido;
 polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado.³⁰⁵

There is in Eielson's poetry a sense of purity related to death as can be seen from the poem 'Via Veneto': 'más puro todavía/ y más próximo a la muerte' (p. 145). The purification by fire, that is, the concentration of existence seems to follow in a pattern of images of condensation such as undressing and defecating that would point to a transcendence of the individual via these substances. The point of 'Elegía' is *what remains after*. This is a focal point in Eielson's work. There is a search for *that* which I have called intimacy in the introduction to this section. What this search is for can be named in different ways, the essence of existence, the centre of the individual, the secret depth. But they all make reference to the same ineffable reality. It is this ineffable reality that connects things together and it is the centre of the web metaphor, that which cannot be seen but from where all stems.

I believe that this search for the elusive essence of existence can be traced in the images of fragmented bodies or of viscera in Eielson's poetry. In the section entitled 'Connections' I dealt with the body's

³⁰⁴ John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 906.

³⁰⁵ Francisco de Quevedo, 'Amor constante más allá de la muerte', in *Antología poética*, ed. with a prologue by Jorge Luis Borges (Madrid: Alianza, 1982), p. 80.

interiority in its relation with exterior spaces, and in the present analysis I will deal with the body as the place where the secret of existence is hidden. The corporeal character of the images suggests that the secret is not otherworldly; it is within the body that the search takes place. But even if Eielson had in mind an overtly religious idea as Canfield seems to suggest, it is still within the body that this would have a presence in the world.³⁰⁶ This preoccupation with presence is a primary root in Eielson's poetics.

The question about presence is patent or implied throughout the poems of books like *Habitación en Roma*. In the poem 'Azul ultramar' (p. 140-144) from that book we find the following lines:

¿en *dónde* está mi doble
palpitante y *escondido*
mi corazón encogido
y su quejido? (p. 142)³⁰⁷

The two *underlined* expressions point to a search for the presence of that double. The heart as his double is a synecdoche, a figure of condensation as much as the cinders are an image of condensation. The localisation of the poet's existence is the heart hidden inside his body. This double is unknown; therefore Eielson seems to be saying, 'I too am unknown to my self'. The search for intimacy is also a search for himself. This becomes evident in the images from his childhood, which also point to this search. A need to remember, to reconnect with the past:

Sueño que soy niño todavía
Y que mi hermana viste noche y día [...]
Sueño una abuela dormida en una silla
Y mi hermano mayor en bicicleta (p. 217)

³⁰⁶ Canfield, 'Largo viaje del cuerpo hacia la luz', in *Nu/do*, p. 102.

³⁰⁷ My emphasis.

But these memories also reconnect him to his native land. In 'Poema para destruir de inmediato sobre la poesía la infancia y otras metamorfosis' (pp. 155-159) we read:

recuerdo los veranos
de mi infancia en el Perú
recuerdo una puerta de madera
un grupo de caballos empapados
y la luz de un lamparín
en el ocaso (p. 157)

These images from his childhood find a culmination in the closing lines from 'Último cuerpo' (p. 200): 'Los intestinos vuelven al abismo azul/ En donde yacen los caballos/ Y el tambor de nuestra infancia.' The connection made moves away from childhood memories and into the reality of what exists: the connection between different presences that ultimately takes him back to his origin. The connection between the body, the earth and the past is undeniable.

This is different from the poem quoted before 'Sueño que escribo y mientras sueño' (p. 217) from *De materia verbalis*, where the poet remembers his siblings and his grandmother. This is a meditation on writing and memory, the recreation of memories in and through writing, and the character of reality. This mediation is part of a pattern in Eielson's work where distance is what the poet addresses. This distance can be both real and figurative. It can be the distance between the past and the present, Europe and Peru, between words and things: 'Y la tristeza pegada/ a la palabra nada' ('Arte poética I', p. 268). This distance can also signify distance within himself or between himself and the world as in the following example from *Mutatis mutandis* (p. 177):

oh laberinto
diamantes en marcha
electricidad que canta
en sus altos divinos cilindros
qué lejos ya mi corazón
mis intestinos y mi voz todo
misteriosamente dispuesto en cúpulas
iguales como las estaciones
o el manto de las horas
todo en busca
de esplendores que no llegan
de evaporados mundos
de lejanas y altas velocidades
que no perdonan³⁰⁸

This poem addresses the relationship between modernity and the body. The images of the body are interior. The voice signals the connection between the interiority of the body and the exteriority of the world. There is a distance between the cylinders and speeds which seem to acquire a life of their own and the heart, the viscera and the voice of the poet. This is done by comparing the voice of the machines and his own:

electricidad que canta
en sus altos divinos cilindros
qué lejos ya mi corazón
mis intestinos y mi voz

The poem recreates the individual's claustrophobic sensation in the modern industrialised city. Only two lines are dedicated to the body,

³⁰⁸ My emphasis.

these are surrounded by lines about machines and speed. The poem recreates the paradoxical isolation of modern man. On the one hand, he is surrounded by new technology. On the other, there is an unbridgeable gap between his humanity and this new reality. If we think about the presence of organic realities such as the body and the earth we will see that for Eielson there was a growing distance between existence and the world created by modernity.

This alienation from the world invites the poet to search the interiority of his own body. This body is his own reality in the world, his own presence among things. In the poem 'Cuerpo melancólico' (p. 188):

Si el corazón se nubla el corazón
La amapola de carne que adormece
Nuestra vida el brillo del dolor arroja
El cerebro en la sombra y los riñones
Hígado intestinos y hasta los mismos labios
La nariz y las orejas se oscurecen
Los pies se vuelven esclavos
De las manos y los ojos se humedecen
El cuerpo entero padece
De una enfermedad violeta
Cuyo nombre es melancholia y cuyo emblema
Es una silla vacía

From the interiority of the body the poem moves outward; from the viscera to the senses as the doors to the outside world. The naming of the different organs, senses, and extremities helps to create in the reader a sense of the body's spatiality. This movement from the interior of the body to the exterior of the world signals the presence of his body, it gives it volume and reality, it makes it present. That is, the feeling described in the poem reassures the poet's presence in the world. It

generates the *feeling* of existence; the inner experience of *existing* in oneself, in one's own body. The viscera form and cover a space: the centre of existence. The sense of movement in this poem places the hidden source of the feeling of melancholy in the deeper spaces of the body; the feeling bubbles from inside and takes over the whole body. Melancholy is linked to the feeling of existence since it reaffirms the individual's presence in the world by emphasising his isolation: 'by its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude.'³⁰⁹ This melancholy connects back with what I have said about alienation, one of the reasons why Eielson moves into the body.

What Eielson is trying to describe is the 'antigua enfermedad violeta'. Here again we find this essential colour for the poet.³¹⁰ The symbol of the empty chair is present at different stages of Eielson's work. We find it in photographs, installations such as *La escala infinita* and *Primera muerte de María*, the visual poems such as *Esta silla de madera es de papel*. This image goes against the grain of the tradition of Western art, in which the subject of melancholy is depicted by a sitting figure with the head resting on one of the hands: 'the primary significance of this age-old gesture, which appeared even in the mourners in reliefs on Egyptian sarcophagi, is grief.'³¹¹ This absence, this sense of loss, is what constitutes the basis for Freud's theory of melancholy.³¹² In Eielson melancholy is a core feeling of existence since it reassures the presence of the body. The empty chair is indeed a symbol of melancholy, since it indicates the conspicuous absence of a sitting figure. This symbolism is doubled by the use of the colour purple. Like in Girondo's *En la*

³⁰⁹ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p. 3.

³¹⁰ This colour here is expressly linked to the feeling of melancholy. It is unavoidable not to think about the similar link between the colour blue, blues music and blues aesthetics. The connection between jazz and blues makes it possible to think about a link in Eielson between the colour purple, melancholy and jazz, particularly the saxophone. In a poem from a book from the early 90s, *Celebración*, about the jazz musician Charlie Parker entitled 'A un pájaro de nombre Charlie' Eielson writes: 'El rayo violeta de Saturno/ Baña tu cuerpo y tus sábanas sucias', pp. 337-341 (p. 340).

³¹¹ Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964), pp. 286-287.

³¹² Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholy', in *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. by Jennifer Radden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 283-294.

masmédula we find in this poem something like a chiaroscuro. The chiaroscuro is a subtle way to underline the general feeling in the poem. Words like 'nubla', 'brillo', 'sombra', 'oscurecen', function to recreate a permutation between light and shadow in the mind of the reader, which suggest a subtle dramatisation of the poem. The reader saw how one of the ways in which Gironde creates the atmosphere of *En la masmédula* is through the use of words that suggest dark and light contrasts. As in the case of the Argentinean, these contrasts create a sense of movement, which in its turn implies an exterior/interior dynamics.

This exterior/interior dynamics is exemplified by this line from 'Cuerpo en exilio' (p. 190): 'caminando con el páncreas'. To 'walk with the pancreas' indicates that the basic activity of movement, an activity related to the world, is for the poet something that also involves his interiority. The dividing line between what is exterior and what is interior is eroded away. This is further suggested by this line from the same poem: 'me duele la bragueta'. Clothing becomes part of the body, a space of fusion where the body and the exterior world have melted together. The zipper is also an opening, or, rather, the possibility of an opening. The world—exteriority—in 'Cuerpo en exilio' is depicted as 'una esfera de plomo que me aplasta el corazón' and as 'las personas y las cosas me dan miedo'. This anxiety is directly related to his exposed interiority. Such exposure has in other poems connotations of a physical open wound, such as 'venas cartílagos y nervios' from 'Cuerpo pasajero'. This gory imagery seems to be connected to a pain of existential anxiety through vulnerability in his relation with the world.

'Cuerpo en exilio' moves on to hint at that ineffable centre of existence, relating it to music. The poem continues:

Tan sólo escucho el *sonido*
De un *saxofón* hundido entre mis huesos
Los *tambores* silenciosos de mi sexo

Y mi cabeza

The sound of the saxophone and of the drums indicates the elusive nature of what Eielson is seeking. Since the poet listens to the sounds of the saxophone and feels the waves of the drums, these internal associations suggest an interior space. That the *I* is able to give an account of these indicates that it is separated from them, since sound creates a feeling of time which implies space in the travelling of the sound waves.³¹³ The head, the genitals, are the origin of the drumming; the heart as the origin of the saxophone. These have become places of origin, sources that mark a distance between them and the *I* who is speaking about hearing the sounds which are coming from those spaces. The drumming and the saxophone suggest that there are spaces in the interiority of the body to which the *I* does not have access and imply secrecy. The distance between the *I* and the viscera and the spaces where sound emanates from suggests a compound interiority. This in itself points to a space where the secret, the mystery of existence may be found:

Todo está lleno de luces el laberinto
Es una construcción de carne y hueso
Un animal amurallado bajo el cielo
En cuyo vientre duerme una muchacha
Con una flecha de oro
En el ombligo ('Cuerpo secreto', p. 193)

The poem is not a medium to explain or elucidate. It is an exploration of the reality of existence that 'no intenta registrar un pensamiento previo al poema, sentido antes de que el poema sea escrito, sino que el pensamiento como la palabra se desplazan tanteando en la

³¹³ Pardo, *Las formas de la exterioridad*, pp. 26-36.

oscuridad.³¹⁴ The poem—and Eielson's artistic work in general—establishes a relationship with knowledge. Not a philosophical or scientific enquiry, but an intuitive and emotive one. The kind of knowledge that the epigraph by San Juan de la Cruz that opens *Noche oscura del cuerpo* makes reference to, the mystical non-knowledge that transcends all knowledge 'era cosa tan secreta/ que me quedé balbuciendo,/ toda ciencia trascendiendo'.³¹⁵ If San Juan's book *Noche oscura del alma* is an exposition on the soul's trials and tribulations on its way to the mystical union with Divinity, Eielson's work seems to be the becoming of what Marsilio Ficino called the spirit: the union between the body and the Soul: 'as in us the spirit is the bond [connecting link] of Soul and body'.³¹⁶ Eielson is not seeking an all-encompassing knowledge, he is seeking the most immediate, his body:

No estoy hablando del amor ni de la nada
 Quiero tan sólo conocer mis intestinos
 Escondidos como peces
 Entre mi corazón y el páncreas amarillo ('Primavera de fuego y ceniza en el cine Rex de Roma', p. 242)

The poet here disregards the major themes—love, nothingness. He humbly pleads to know his own interiority. The knowledge that becomes imperative is the body's. However, this is not in a psychological but in a physical sense; because the body is, for Eielson, 'lo más cercano que somos'. This construction implies a distance. The use of 'cercano' implies that distance between the body that is the presence and the interiority from which it grows and which feeds it.

³¹⁴ Hugo Gola 'Experiencia y lenguaje', quoted in William Rowe, *Poets of Contemporary Latin America*, p. 16.

³¹⁵ San Juan de la Cruz, 'Entréme donde no supe', in *Obras Completas*, ed. by Lucinio Ruano de la Iglesia CD, 14th edn (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1994), pp. 80-81.

³¹⁶ Marsilio Ficino, *De lumine*, quoted in Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. by Virginia Conant (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 116.

Further on in the same poem we understand why this knowledge of interiority has become imperative: 'una película en colores es mi cuerpo'. Whether he means the celluloid strip itself or its projection onto a screen, this is an image of flatness. This concept seems to address the role of images—photography and cinema—in modern culture that has been indicative of a loss of depth in the life of man. Cinema is framing this poem. Ann Friedberg opens the introduction of her book *Window Shopping* with a discussion about the post-modern condition based on the effects of photography and cinema on memory and history in post-industrialist society.³¹⁷ Friedberg's argument is based on the premise that 'a diminished capacity to retain the past is [...] a loss that has figured as the price of the cinema's cultural gain.'³¹⁸ And she introduces Benjamin's idea of the work of art in the era of mechanical reproduction, and within this his concept of the aura present in the original work but not in the mechanically reproduced:

Benjamin would note the more profound exponents of the alterations of space and time made possible by mechanical reproduction: the *social* changes produced by spatial proliferation and its metonymic aspect, repeatability over time. "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art," Benjamin would write in "Work of Art," is lacking in one element: *its presence in time and space*, its unique existence at the *place* where it happens to be". [...] The absent "presence" of a mechanically-reproduced work of art was what Benjamin began to theorize as "aura", the mystified quality of authenticity of the original that was lost in the age of mechanical reproduction.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 1-13.

³¹⁸ Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, p. 2.

³¹⁹ Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, p. 48.

The poem's cinematic context can be taken as a reference to presence and authenticity. If photography and cinema do not have a unique presence, then the preoccupation of the poet turns towards that search for presence. In the poem, cinema is an example of what can be mechanically reproduced, there is no original. To say that 'una película a colores es mi cuerpo' refers to the feeling of loss of depth, of losing that intimate space that cannot be projected on to a screen; the loss of the original presence in time and space that intimacy implies.

'Quiero tan sólo conocer mis intestinos' in this context can be understood as a revolt against the flatness imposed by modern culture symbolised by cinema. The body's presence in space and time is taken as the basis for the relationship with reality. The aura is directly related to the authenticity of an original, singular existence. This singular existence has a unique presence in time and space. It cannot be in two places at once. This is why the poet says: 'no tengo tiempo para saber otra cosa'. The body is the immediate reality, what it is possible to know and from where it is possible to gauge the rest of the cosmos.

So far I have contextualised Eielson's sense of internal space based on the idea of an intimate interior space. In several of his poems I found references to viscera which I understand to be indications of the physical nature of his search. Emblematic within these images is the poem 'Via Veneto' which deals with the fragmentation of his body. This fragmentation is parallel to the negative way of 'Elegía'; Eielson clears away what is on the way of the mystery. The fragmentation of the body implies an interior search that points to the mystery of existence. This search points to a communion between the body and its more metaphysical aspects:

me pregunto
si verdaderamente
tengo manos

si realmente poseo
 una cabeza y dos pies
 y no tan sólo guantes
 y zapatos y sombrero
 y por qué me siento
 tan puro
 más puro todavía
 y más próximo a la muerte
 cuando me quito los guantes
 el sombrero y los zapatos
 como si me quitara las manos
 la cabeza y los pies ('Via Veneto', p. 145)

This poem is divided into three converging areas. One, the *I* who asks and articulates the poem: 'me pregunto'. Two, the body represented by the extremities and the head: 'una cabeza y dos pies'. Three, their corresponding clothing items: 'el sombrero y los zapatos'. The body is presented as an assembly of parts similar to the ensemble of clothes that frame the body. The speaker takes off his limbs as if they were prosthetic, as removable as the items of clothing that cover them. It is because of this that there is no sense of graphic violence in the dismemberment. It is as if he were taking off an item of clothing. The use of the word 'puro' gives a paradoxical sense of tranquillity. However, this playful dismemberment does not literally take place in the poem, the poet clarifies: 'como si me quitara'. He is asking the reader, and himself as the reader of his own experience seen through the distance granted by writing, to imagine this dismemberment in order to access some knowledge of his experience. The feeling the poem creates is reminiscent of surrealist aesthetics of body fragmentation.³²⁰ The imaginary

³²⁰ Amy Lyford, 'The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the *Musée du Val-de-Grâce* in 1917', *Cultural Critique*, 46 (2000), 45-79; Uta Felten, 'Fragmentation of the Body in Spanish Surrealism', in *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. by Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 241-245.

dismemberment in 'Via Veneto' functions as an opening, a clearing away, for the search of the essential element that keeps the subject unified; what remains, the ashes from 'Elegía, for example. In imagining his own dismemberment the poet is questioning his own reality in the world, the possibility of his existence. The limits of the body are in question here. Eielson is not saying, 'this is my body and therefore this is the only reality', but also putting this notion under scrutiny. There is something similar in the novel *The Star Rover* by Jack London. There we find the next passage about the limits of the body in relation to the essence of existence. It is an extensive passage but it is necessary to quote at length:

It is life that is the reality and the mystery. Life is vastly different from mere chemic matter fluxing in high modes of motion. Life persists. Life is the thread of fire that persists through all the modes of matter. I know. I am life. I have lived ten thousand generations. I have lived millions of years. I have possessed many bodies. I, the possessor of these many bodies, have persisted. I am life. I am the unquenched spark ever flashing and astonishing the face of time, ever working my will and wreaking my passion on the cloddy aggregates of matter, called bodies, which I have transiently inhabited.

For you look. This finger of mine, so quick with sensation, so subtle to feel, so delicate in its multifarious dexterities, so firm and strong to crook and be stiffened by means of cunning leverages—this finger is not I. Cut it off. I live. The body is mutilated. I am not mutilated. The spirit that is I is whole.

Very well. Cut off all my fingers. I am I. the spirit is entire. Cut off both hands. Cut off both arms at the shoulder-sockets. And I, the unconquerable and indestructible, I survive. Am I any the less for these mutilations, for these subtractions of the flesh?

Certainly not. Clip my hair. Shave from me with sharp razors my lips, my nose, my ears—ay, and tear out the eyes of me by the roots; and there, mewed in that featureless skull that is attached to a hacked and mangled torso, that in that cell of the chemic flesh, will still be I, unmutated, undiminished.

Oh, the heart still beats. Very well. Cut out the heart, or, better, fling the flesh-remnant into a machine of a thousand blades and make mincemeat of it—and I, I, don't you understand, all the spirit and mystery and the vital fire and life of me, am off and away. I have not perished. Only the body has perished, and the body is not I.³²¹

I do not mean to draw an exact parallel. There are substantial differences with Eielson's ideas. There are two points to link, one is the deconstruction of the body in search for the mystery of existence, Life; and the transcendence of this mystery beyond existence but that takes shape in individual existences. 'Life that is the reality and the mystery' and the search for this ineffable mystery is done by subtracting all that which is not it. In 'Via Veneto' we find a similar if less gruesome account of a similar search. The result from taking off his clothes does not result in nudity alone, or in body parts scattered across the floor, but further on in the issue about purity: 'más puro todavía.' This is about the authenticity of presence. But since presence lies in the body this purity is to be found separated from the body however near to it, in that proximity to which Eielson referred to by the adjective 'cercano'. I think that this purity is of what lies beyond the body, hidden in the very depths of it; what Jack London called Life. But Eielson links this purity with death: 'más puro todavía/ y más próximo a la muerte'. Death is absence and silence. Unlike London who thought the body an illusion, for Eielson the

³²¹ Jack London, *The Star Rover* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), pp. 101-102.

dismemberment of his body creates a paradox since it brings him closer to death while revealing an understanding about life.³²²

To compare undressing to dismembering points to the deconstruction of the cultural subject, it rids him of all added meanings leaving him with his body alone closer to natural existence. The proximity to death becomes the form of the search for the essence of existence, the essence of his own being unveiled only in death. The poet's imaginary approximation to death brings him to a pure existential experience. Pure would mean, in this context, indicated by undressing, the shedding of those added meanings: culture, history, etc. In the face of death existence, presence, become exalted. The relation between purity and death is based upon the consideration that death is the ultimate purity where nothing except itself happens. But this *itself*, that which is left after everything has been taken off, is nothing. This nothing is pure existence. In the approximation to the purity of death the poet faces only his own existence where there is no history, society, civilization nor sexuality. In 'Via Veneto' the *I* speaking the poem is the pivot around which the body parts and the items of clothing revolve. This *I* is the face of presence for the reader and this is what holds the body together just as the body holds the different parts of a suit. Continuing this rationale, what the poem is ultimately speaking about is the presence of language, of the poem itself: 'la retórica—el ropaje—del poema nos permite solamente vislumbrar la poesía.'³²³ On the other hand, it could be considered according to Joanne Entwistle that 'human bodies are *dressed* bodies' that to undress, to take off the parts of the body, amounts to a commentary on the localisation of humanity and existence.³²⁴ Poem and body have these similarities, they are the materials that gather around to give presence to the mystery of existence.

³²² London, *The Star Rover*, p. 101.

³²³ Eielson, 'Para una preparación poética', in *Nu/do*, p. 436.

³²⁴ Entwistle, 'The Dressed Body', p. 33.

To further clarify this idea of existence I will contrast what has been said so far about 'Via Veneto' with the poem 'Cuerpo enamorado'. The main idea that I wish to develop here stems from the 'purification' involved in the undressing and dismemberment of 'Via Veneto'. There is an aspect of the poem 'Cuerpo enamorado' (p. 191) that represents the pure *existence* which 'Via Veneto' speaks of. I have just written about the implications of 'Via Veneto' in the poet's search for existence. However, at the moment it is the presence of clothing that I would like to emphasise. The idea is that clothing stands for a civilisatory conditioning of an embodied subjectivity. Nudity would be a condensation to the bare minimum of existence. The idea behind this is a common existence between humans and all other living creatures: the fact of possessing a body-mass that gives them a presence in the world:

Miro mi sexo con ternura
Toco la punta de mi cuerpo enamorado
Y no soy yo que veo sino *el otro*
El mismo mono milenario
Que se refleja en el remanso y ríe
Amo el espejo en que contemplo
Mi espesa barba y mi tristeza
Mis pantalones grises y la lluvia
Miro mi sexo con ternura y mis testículos
Repletos de amargura
Y no soy yo que sufre sino el otro
El mismo mono milenario
Que se refleja en el espejo y llora

For the present reading I am interested in focusing on the animalisation of the poet's other. The '*el mismo mono milenario*' is the poet's essential animal existence: pure existence devoid of cultural

conditionings. It is the biological fact of existence, the one that is there before history, civilisation, and culture. It is the simple fact of the existence of a body-mass in the world. To see himself as a monkey signifies his proximity to an existence in which there is nothing blocking the experience of existing itself. An animal just is, without a why. The 'primeval monkey' plays on the concept of evolution. What is at the basis of a human being's existence is still an animal that lives unconditioned by civilization. Beyond the biological accuracy of this idea what Eielson is trying to suggest here is that an animal does not feel separated from the rest of creation; as Camus expressed regarding an existential nostalgia produced by this separation and the isolation of existence.³²⁵ By appealing to that basic side of his existence, Eielson is trying to reconnect to that transcendent element in him; a transcendence that is not metaphysical, but that lives and is expressed in the reality of nature. There is a similar use of imagery in Girondo. He also wanted to approximate a purer, more direct experience. In the poem 'Porque me cree su perro', we read: 'aunque retorne al árbol del primo primo simio me sacaré yo/ sin tino la maraña/ demasiadísimo humana'.³²⁶ As we can also see in Girondo's poem 'humanity' is blocking the way to a more direct experience of existence. However, in Eielson the most important thing is not degrading humanity but getting close to existence, the experience of existing. By returning to an animal state in the search for the experience of existence the poets are discarding the constraints of society and culture. In his essay 'Saber existir' Eielson writes about the difference between existing and living: 'es el placer de vivir que se opone al sagrado misterio de la existencia; es superando los refinamientos de la vida que se afronta la sustancia de la vida'.³²⁷ The similarity I see between the primate images and this quotation from 'Saber existir' is the reduction from a broader field into a concentrated one. On the one hand

³²⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 45.

³²⁶ OC, p. 257.

³²⁷ Eielson, 'Saber existir', in *Nu/do*, pp. 375-377 (p. 376).

there is civilized man, thousands of years of cultural evolution from pre-history to the contemporary world in which the poet lives. Within this field of vision man is civilized man. But there is something before this, the bare fact of existence. The condensation—into an animal, from life to existence—is not degrading but rather an approach to the mysteries of existence: 'a la retórica de la vida opongo la desnudez de la existencia.'³²⁸

Since the recognition of the poet's animal other happens in front of a mirror, this can also be an ironic and grotesque take on the myth of Narcissus. According to José Ángel Valente's reading of this myth, it is not with his self that Narcissus falls in love but with the *other* of himself;³²⁹ one that could not have been seen, and thus known, without the reflection on the water:

Imagen que súbitamente se revela, es revelación, condensación o cristalización repentina del sentido, epifanía. Narciso: revelación en la imagen y por la imagen; epifanía del otro en la imagen de sí. [...] Narciso ve en la fuente aquello que de sí mismo sus propios ojos no pueden ver. Y así genera el uno, por la imagen, al otro de sí.³³⁰

In 'Cuerpo enamorado' the poet is standing in front of a mirror looking at himself. Looking at himself in the mirror becomes an essential activity for Eielson. It becomes an exercise in self-knowledge. And it echoes all the way back to the Greek *know thy self*. About this idea in Eielson we find these lines 'una película en colores es mi cuerpo/ no tengo tiempo para saber otra cosa' ('Cine Rex' p. 243). In this light the subject of masturbation in his poetry can be set within a conceptual context. At first Marcolin's interpretation about this element in Eielson's

³²⁸ Eielson, 'Saber existir', in *Nu/do*, p. 377.

³²⁹ José Ángel Valente, 'Pasma de Narciso', in *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red*, Marginales, 114 (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1991), pp. 22-23.

³³⁰ Valente, 'Pasma de Narciso', in *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red*, pp. 22-23.

work seems correct: 'la frustración y la falta de un verdadero contacto con otra persona, inducen al hombre a la auto-atención.'³³¹ I do not deny this facet of isolation, especially within the subject of man in a post-industrialised society. But what Marcolin sees as a psycho-pathology: 'la masturbación se vuelve símbolo del aislamiento absoluto, del cerrarse frente al mundo [...] esta forma de narcisismo',³³² I consider a form of knowledge, even if some aspects of this are indeed related to feelings of isolation. The unfolding of the self, especially in the poems from *Ceremonia solitaria*, point not to a closing down to the world but an acceptance of man's limitations: what he can *really* know during his life is his own body. Therefore masturbation is not a necessarily a negative activity but the giving up of himself to himself. In 'Ceremonia solitaria en compañía de mi mismo' (pp. 253-253) we read:

Que no conozco nada
 Más oscuro ni más tibio
 Más oscuro ni más tibio
 Más redondo ni más puro
 [...]
 Cada día me parezco más a ti
 Que no te pareces a nadie

This 'auto-erotic' poem is structured as a series of repetitions that suggest that in observing his own body in the mirror the poet is not seeing his isolation and suffering but is in a constant state becoming what he is and who he is. Man, in this way, never truly *is* since he is always becoming what he is. He records his transformations with age. Eielson recognises his own temporality, and the constant observation points to a sort of constant updating of information about his body. The knowledge of his body is also the basis for the knowledge of the world,

³³¹ Silvia Marcolin, 'La poética del cuerpo', in *Nudos y asedios críticos*, p. 69.

³³² Marcolin, 'La poética del cuerpo', p. 70.

the knowledge of others. Marcolin accepts that there might be a form of self-knowledge involved in this aspect of Eielson's work, but she undermines this to exalt the negative aspects of it.³³³ She writes about the self-contemplating images in Eielson:

Produce a menudo una forma de sufrimiento, porque el yo, viéndose igual a todos sus semejantes, pierde toda exclusividad. En efecto, la actitud natural del hombre de reservar un lugar privilegiado para sí mismo fracasa al constatar que no hay nada especial en él o nada que lo diferencie de los demás.³³⁴

This interpretation is not considering essential aspects of Eielson's views on life and existence, such as his relationship with Zen Buddhism. This doctrine greatly influenced the way in which he considered reality. It is from this perspective that it could be argued that a man is not necessarily different from any other existing creature.³³⁵ In a letter from Eielson to Renato Sandoval we read:

No quisiera que la repetida presencia del cuerpo en muchos de mis escritos denote una forma de antropocentrismo que no me es propio. En palabras simples, *para mí el cuerpo, nuestro cuerpo, no es sino una parte de la realidad material, no más soberana e inquietante que una jirafa, una estrella, una piedra o un árbol cualquiera*. O sea una concepción oriental de la realidad, que ya he hecho mía desde hace muchísimo tiempo. Lo que sucede, sencillamente, es que nuestro cuerpo es lo más inmediato que tenemos, o mejor aún: es lo más inmediato *que somos*.³³⁶

³³³ Marcolin, 'La poética del cuerpo', p. 70.

³³⁴ Marcolin, 'La poética del cuerpo', p. 70.

³³⁵ See interviews with Martha Canfield, 'Hablar con Eielson' <http://eielson.perucultural.org.pe/jee7.htm>, and with Michel Fosse, 'El hombre que anudó las banderas' <http://eielson.perucultural.org.pe/arte8.htm>. [accessed 10 October 2007]

³³⁶ Quoted in Renato Sandoval, 'El cuerpo y la noche oscura', in *Nudos y asedios críticos*, pp. 127-139 (p. 128). My emphasis.

With this in mind it is safe to speak of a man before history, culture and society; a man who shares with the rest of reality the basic fact of existence. Throughout his poetry Eielson displays an array of images and ideas regarding a kind of organic transcendence where it is not the particular subject who goes on to form part of *another life* but that his own vitality and existence go on to take on a different form. We see this in lines like:

Sin saber que su sonrisa
Sus vestidos y sus huesos
Paseaban tranquilamente
Hace millares de años
Y seguirán paseando todavía
Millares de años más. (p. 203)

Or these lines

quisiera ser de nylon
de celophan de acero
de sonrientes materias
que no mueren
no soy en cambio
sino de carne y hueso
jugete pálido del jazz
y de las horas
miserable volumen
que padece

Eielson is not only concerned with his exclusive individuality but with the essential experience of existence. It is from the fact of a shared existence that stems the feeling of solidarity and communion in his work. This experience is exclusive insofar as it is lived by a single person; however the fact of it is shared by all living creatures. This biological fact is what I relate to the presence of images of primates in his poems. These, of course, have a certain grotesque aspect. However I do not believe that this was the poet's primary intention. On the contrary, I believe that the reference to primates in poems like 'Cuerpo enamorado' and 'Ceremonia solitaria frente a un espejo cualquiera' are not 'una visión degradada del ser humano' as Marcolin sees it but a facing up to the fact of existence.³³⁷ The animal side of man is no more rejected by Eielson than his biological need to everyday 'sentarse humildemente/ a defecar' ('Cuerpo último', p. 200). The primate images are a giving up of power. The opposite side of this is that this is actually an empowerment, since the poet is giving up the yoke of culture and history, as it is for Gironde. The unfolding of the poet's self onto the image of an animal on the mirror's reflexion is a relinquishing of his humanity insofar as this is understood to be related to civilization. This animal is a remainder—a remnant—of the aspect of ourselves that binds us to existence. I see in the repetition of people in lines such as 'veo también/ millares y millares de personas/ todas iguales a mí' is something more essential than the loss of individuality. If there is a psychological intention in these images as Marcolin suggests, it seems to me that this is surpassed in meaning by the question that these lines open. That is, this is not about loss of exclusivity but about the possibilities of individuality. This is not a giving up of individuality but the recognition of different forms of existence of which humanity is only one.

There is a clear relationship in Eielson's poetry between the search for an internal space and physical existence. What this space holds or

³³⁷ Marcolin, 'La poética del cuerpo', p. 70.

indicates is existence; an existence that is shared with all living creatures. It comes down to presence; the bare fact of existing in a particular body in a particular place and time. This will connect with the final section of this chapter on Jorge Eduardo Eielson in the presence of the work of art as a material object in the world and how Eielson intended to create a work which would have a presence in the world or that would question the presence of works of art.

5. CONCLUSIONS: READING, LOOKING

In this present and final section in this chapter I will address the questions of presence and of the seen and the unseen elements in Eielson's visual work which relate to what has been previously discussed in regards to the limits of interiority and exteriority. In the course of this chapter I have tried to explore these questions in different aspects of Eielson's written work. In the present section I will analyse the issues of presence that Eielson expresses in the idea he had of writing itself. This will be complemented by the idea that his visual work is a literal expression of presence that creates a relationship between the seen and the unseen. In this way I will be able to corroborate that presence forms the root of Eielson's artistic vision.

In order to understand these questions we must look at the limitations Eielson saw in language and writing. It is from these limitations of that the expressive needs of the artist overflows into other manifestations and it is also because of this that we can understand the *intercrossing* between the different media in his work. I will now explore the idea of presence that can be deduced from within the poems themselves. However, it is first necessary to contextualise Eielson's views on the limitations of language. In his 'Manual de lectura', first published in November of 1954, we read the following:

El terror de no escribir lealmente (de corazón y de pensamiento) se transformó lentamente en una superconciencia y el entero aparato de mi expresión se detuvo de golpe y me fue necesario desmontarlo, y examinarlo pieza por pieza en busca del trauma, tratando al mismo tiempo de introducir algunas mejoras en su arcaica estructura. [...] Fue de este modo que abandoné la escritura y decidí aventurarme en el campo contrario a fin de reconocer sus límites, sus posibilidades y por lo tanto los medios más eficaces para conquistarlo.³³⁸

This disappointment with written language and its resulting adventure in reading can be related to his visual work. What this shows is that by 1954 Eielson was strongly questioning the expressive and communicative capabilities of written language. The examples from the poems where these limits are an integral part of the meaning of the text will demonstrate that the overt reference to limits functions as an opening to the exterior of the text. On the other side of this opening we will find the visual work. This becomes palpable from the book *Tema y variaciones* of 1950. In this book Eielson is concerned with the presence of language on the page and with the correspondence between language and reality.

Later his attention will turn to the page itself in *Canto de papel*.³³⁹ This is a series of photographs of sheets of paper with texts that explain in a self-referential way the sheet of paper and the text that describes a particular sheet.³⁴⁰ I believe there is a direct connection between his different work with language and other media such as the *quipus* or performances; their themes and meanings conjoin. The achieved effect could not have been conveyed by a single medium. This becomes a sort of reiteration, a repeated approach from different perspectives. This repetition becomes invaluable for Eielson's creative objectives. The point

³³⁸ Eielson, 'Manual de lectura', in *Nu/do*, pp. 378-380 (p. 378).

³³⁹ Eielson, *Poesía escrita*, ed. and prologue by Ricardo Silva Santisteban (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1976), pp. 291-301.

³⁴⁰ Rowe, 'The Boundaries of the Poem', pp. 199-200.

is not that one was not enough, but that the poet felt the need to cover the phenomenon he was after from diverse angles. The abstract nature of language could not fully engage the mystery of presence. Eielson does not seek to explain the mystery but to recreate it. His performances and his art objects *recreate* the mystery. That is, they create another object with a presence in the world. In this way the act of presence is repeated, but not explained nor abstracted into a concept. In terms of his use of language from the 1950s onwards Eielson will sometimes come close to the footsteps of Brazilian concrete poetry:

Las preocupaciones de Eielson fueron semejantes a las del movimiento concreto brasileño. Su insistencia, sin embargo, fue en otra dirección: hacia el cuerpo y sus superficies visibles e invisibles, hacia la materia.³⁴¹

The trace on the surface of the paper made by the act of writing becomes essential for Eielson's poetics. It is a way to include in the poem a record of the moment of writing. In some cases this recorded act becomes the poem:

escribo algo
algo todavía
algo más aún
añado palabras pájaros
hojas secas viento
borro palabras nuevamente
borro pájaros hojas secas viento
escribo algo todavía
vuelvo a añadir palabras
palabras otra vez

³⁴¹ Rowe, 'Sólo silencio', p. 21.

palabras aún
además pájaros hojas secas viento
borro palabras nuevamente
borro pájaros hojas secas viento
borro todo por fin
no escribo nada (p. 184)

The direct allusion to writing modifies the space of the poem, the surface of the page. This modification consists of making literal the correspondence between things and words. Not, however, with the things that the words are meant to designate but rather with act of writing a series of symbols on the surface of a page. The poem is saying that the poet is writing 'pájaros' and 'hojas secas' and this is what is read on the page. We read his creative process. Thus the correspondence is mainly between the graphic symbols and the action of writing and reading these. When we read 'escribo pájaros' or 'borro pájaros', the significant correspondence of these words is not with the animal but with the letters and syllables that form the words. In this poem the act of erasing does not eliminate, but instead it adds elements. Erasing is cancelled by the fact of being named in the poem. The addition of words to compose the poem and their supposed subtraction are equivalent, they both create the poem. Not, however, in the act of writing itself, to which only the writer is witness, but in the register of that act: the poem:

Literary speech develops from itself, forming a network in which each point is distinct, distant from even its closest neighbors, and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all.³⁴²

³⁴² Michel Foucault, 'Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside', trans. by Brian Massumi, in *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), pp. 9-58 (p. 12).

The language of this poem is very much an expansion of its own being. The poet is using the poem to register what happens at different levels of the text. This poem by Eielson is a *process* according to Mexican poet and critic José Luis Bobadilla, it 'articula un desarrollo de acciones que vuelven a reproducirse con la lectura.'³⁴³ Language in this poem functions as a register of actions, but also as an action in itself. Underneath this poem runs the idea that written language is a trace that cannot be erased. This is an ethical dimension since it implies that everything we write will be permanently recorded. This poem suggests that writing is always a movement forward, where the act of 'going back on our own steps' leaves another mark. This is the presence of writing, the presence of the poem. The poem is a trace, a footprint. The effects of this concept of writing are discussed by William Rowe as the closure of the distance between writing and reading: 'Eielson's writings, particularly since 1950, explore what happens when the visual space occupied by a text becomes an inherent part of the work itself and the way it is read'.³⁴⁴ Reading is anticipated in the process of writing to the point that it mimics its recreation. The reader advances through the process of the writing the poem he is presently reading. The poem thus creates a closed circuit effect. This circuit between the reader and the poet has a parallel in the relationships that Eielson established among things and with the knots, the paradigm of Eielson's existential philosophy.

It is William Rowe who, in a different essay, describes Eielson's poetic writing in the following way: 'en estos poemas [...] la palabra se despoja y se limita a registrar las superficies de lo físico puro.'³⁴⁵ I believe that this description of language as register is key to understanding the relationship that Eielson establishes between writing and reality. The poem is a register of the experience of reality. It does not describe the

³⁴³ José Luis Bobadilla, 'El uso material y musical en la poesía de Jorge Eduardo Eielson' (unpublished thesis, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, 2003), p. 73.

³⁴⁴ Rowe, 'The Boundaries of the Poem', p. 198. In a poem from the book *Naturaleza muerta* we find: 'la lectura correcta de estas palabras/ dura exactamente 1 segundo y 1 décimo' (p. 229).

³⁴⁵ Rowe, 'Sólo silencio', p. 13.

exteriority of things. Rather it establishes a relationship between the experience and the world outside. As Robert Creeley writes about the relationship between writing and the outside world:

In intention, the prime aspect of a method which plans to deal with the "things around" as characters in themselves, having as their first claim on the attention, their own actuality. In matters of poetry, it amounts to the wish to transmit, free of imprecise "feeling", the nature of "that" which has moved one to write in the first place.³⁴⁶

This is possible because the poem takes part of both ends, the interiority of experience and the exteriority of the world: 'el límite entre la palabra y el silencio, entre la luz y la oscuridad, se extiende hacia el infinito, se hace material de la obra que se abre hacia el infinito.'³⁴⁷ As an example of this we can remember the poem 'Cuando en la noche deseo tocar la luna/ Toco la luna de mis anteojos negros' (p. 231). Here, language makes a substitution from the celestial body to the frame of the spectacles. Language covers the distance between the poet and the moon. This brings us back to the question about correspondence between words and things. There are two elements that must be combined in order to continue with our argument. One is Rowe's comment about language as register and the other about the correspondence between language and things. The situation that arises is that the poem registers a non-linguistic experience. Life is lived, and to express such experience poetry can take different manifestations. In his essay 'Para una preparación poética' Eielson writes:

³⁴⁶ Robert Creeley, 'A Note on the Objective', in *A Sense of Measure* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), pp. 17-18 (p. 17).

³⁴⁷ Rowe, 'Sólo silencio', p. 17.

La poesía se sirve de las palabras para hacerse comunicable. Ellas son un medio de expresión, no la expresión misma. Mucho menos la poesía misma. Superado el medio de las palabras, la poesía reina ilimitada y se confunde con la esencia de las cosas. La poesía, por lo demás, puede prescindir de las palabras (poesía, escultura, música, danza, religión, magia).³⁴⁸

About this aspect of Eielson's poetics Luis Fernando Chueca writes: 'desde esta perspectiva, el conocido título de la obra lírica de Eielson, *Poesía escrita*, refleja claramente la postura de que lo que hay en ese libro es sólo una posibilidad dentro del amplio espectro de la poesía.'³⁴⁹ Beyond this statement lies a more significant aspect, the issue of distance between things and the words that name them. This distance is manifested within the poems in the guise of uncertainty in the correspondence between things and words:

¿pero mañana
cuando me llame perro
el perro jorge
el gato cielo
el cielo gato?

¿mañana
cuando tu pierna se llame brazo
tu brazo boca
tu boca ombligo
tu ombligo nada? ('Caso nominativo', p. 102)

³⁴⁸ Eielson, 'Para una preparación poética', in *Nu/do*, pp.435-437 (p. 436).

³⁴⁹ 'Jorge Eduardo Eielson: entre la aventura y el silencio', in *letras.s5.com: página Chilena al servicio de la cultura* <<http://www.letras.s5.com/je0903061.htm>> [accessed 18 January 2007].

The open questions of this poem allow us to see the way in which the poet plays with this split between things and the words that designate them. Such playfulness is the way in which his imagination considers the different possibilities of covering the split. However, the result is an isolation of language which does not correspond but is related to the exterior reality. The poem is there almost as a new thing in the world. These doubts about language drive Eielson to question not the way things are lived or experienced since this is before language, but the way in which they get recorded. It now becomes necessary to quote two excerpts from the novel *El cuerpo de Giulia-no* where this split comes into play

—¿Quieres un café?—me preguntaste. Yo asentí con la cabeza y tú sin mirarme te deslizaste del lecho, encendiste el gas, pusiste a hervir el agua y preparaste la cafetera y las tazas. O pusiste a hervir el agua, encendiste el gas y preparaste la cafetera y las tazas. O preparaste la cafetera y las tazas, encendiste el gas y pusiste a hervir el agua. Como todos los días³⁵⁰

Or this series of repetitions:

Los objetos, las criaturas y los hechos obedecían docilmente a mi memoria, como siempre.

La cortina rojiza ¿recuerdas? a la expresión cortina rojiza.

La lámpara amarilla a la expresión lámpara amarilla.

La cama revuelta a la expresión cama revuelta.

Tu Gran Traje de Seda por las calles doradas de Roma.

Idéntido a tu Gran Traje de Seda por las calles doradas de Roma.

[...]

Todo como siempre.

³⁵⁰ Eielson, *El cuerpo de Giulia-no*, pp. 126-127.

¿Por qué no todo diferente?

[...]

Tu Gran Traje de seda por las resacas calles de Lima.

La cortina amarilla.

La lámpara revuelta.

La cama rojiza.³⁵¹

The split here is directly related with memory. Since the experience was not verbal the poet must look for words to give shape to his remembrances. But what emerges is not a recollection crystallised into a phrase, but a series of possibilities that form the body of the work; the work becomes an exploration of the past. In the first lines of the second quote the reference to memory designates the passing of time, while the rest of the quote is an arrangement, according to language, of the events that took place. The question '¿por qué no todo diferente?', signals the spatial displacement between things and language. The reference to memory reveals the gap that language will attempt to bridge. But language is not necessarily faithful to past events, but to the creative imagination and to itself. In this way the text functions not as a medium through which someone is able to verbally rebuild the past, but as a reality on its own right. Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* wrote:

Language occupied a fundamental situation in relation to all knowledge: it was only by the medium of language that the things of the world could be known [...] because it was the first sketch of an order in representations of the world; because it was the initial, inevitable way of representing representations.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Eielson, *El cuerpo de Guilia-no*, pp. 138-140.

³⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 322.

Foucault's thesis is that that prior to the nineteenth century there was a direct correspondence between things and the words that represented them. Foucault continues:

From the nineteenth century, language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density [...] *it became one object of knowledge among others*, on the same level as living beings [...] To know language is no longer to come as close as possible to knowledge itself.³⁵³

Considering Eielson in this context, the dislocations between memory and reality, and language and memory are explained because the poet does not require the links to be infallible. As was discussed before, Eielson considers knowledge a direct experience of the body and although this is certainly not the only kind of knowledge for him it is its root. Language does not have precedence over other types of access to experiences or their explanation or description. In Eielson's creative vision language is set in a horizontal web of relationships, where it is connected with other forms of expression and communication without pre-eminence. It is because of this scheme that language can move into other areas of his work, such as the poems in *Canto visual* or *Esta tela es un fragmento del universo* (see fig. 13).

In the poem 'Escultura de palabras para una plaza de Roma' (pp. 169-172), the poem is imagined as a sculpture, in the sense of an object having a physical presence in the world. This sculpture is raised in the mind of the reader. The epigraph from Anaxagoras—'this that raises itself is a vision of the invisible'—signals that the poem as a linguistic structure has become a façade for the invisible. It is because of the poem that we can see something that we can understand and relate to. This simple fact of being present, of having a presence will prove to be of utmost

³⁵³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 322-323. My emphasis.

importance for the poet. This poem echoes an earlier one, 'Inventario' (p. 105), where we find the line 'torre de palabras', where the poem is loosely structured according the principles of a calligram resembling a tower of words. The theme of 'Escultura de palabras' is directly connected with the premises of hidden/visible, internal/external that I have been discussing throughout this chapter. The poem begins:

apareces
y desapareces
eres
y no eres
y eres nuevamente
eres todavía
blanco y negro que no cesa (p. 169)

If we take the last line quoted we can assume that what the poet is talking about here is the poem. The ink on the page appears and disappears to make signs and convey meaning about the poem itself. It is through the crevices of this word-sculpture that the poet is able to catch a fleeting glimpse: 'apareces/ y des apareces/ dejando un hueco encendido/ entre la a y la s'. What there is between the letters is the invisible. The poet is making reference to the letters as objects behind which there lies the ineffable. The poet brings into the game of hidden/visible the body of the text itself. Something passed by between the 'a' and the 's', like a silhouette behind a window. The poem is populated with images that suggest this movement from appearing to disappearing and vice versa: 'alineamiento fugaz', 'macho y hembra confundidos', 'sol y luna en un instante'. Speaking about San Juan de la Cruz and his enigmatic images from his poem the 'Cántico espiritual'—e.g. 'música callada'—Michel de Certeau explains that:

The oxymoron belongs to the category of the *metasemene*, which, like the demonstrative, refers to something beyond language. It is a deictic: it shows what it does not say. The combination of the two terms is substituted for the existence of a third, which is posited as absent. It makes a hole in language [...] it opens up an absence of correspondence between things and words.³⁵⁴

Eielson is shortening the distances and setting that absence right behind the physical presence of the text. This 'hole in language' takes an image in Eielson's poem: 'la luz hermafrodita que se asoma/ entre los pliegues del profeta'. The hermaphroditic light responds to the same logic as the 'sol y luna en un instante'. They are oxymora. The gender ambiguity is also present in other images of the poem such as 'no tienen barba ni senos'. This light peeking through the robes of the prophet comes through the small gaps opened by movement. It gets through and it is seen. The relationship with writing could be the following: Writing is the action that allows the 'mystery' to flash between the ink marks of the letters. It does not contain, explain or recreate it. It addresses the act of writing as something external to the poet through which the 'mystery' can be approximated and evoked:

eres y no eres
sino sonido silencio sonido
silencio nuevamente
sonido otra vez
hormigueo celeste
blanco y negro que no cesa

The black and white can be reversed into an image of the night sky; the blinking stars and the black abyss between them. Poetically this

³⁵⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 143.

image has an important lineage, Mallarmé being its most prominent modern contributor: 'EXCEPTÉ [...] PEUT-ÊTRE [...] UNE CONSTELLATION'.³⁵⁵ In Latin America it is the concrete poets Haroldo de Campos with his book *Galaxias* and his brother Augusto de Campos with his poem 'o pulsar', both of them creating a dialogue with the French poet, who are the lineage of that poem.³⁵⁶ But these literary links go deeper than a shared image of the night sky. Mallarmé and the Brazilian concrete poets—for whom Mallarmé is an essential reference—are concerned with the act of writing itself and its repercussions in reality. For the three poets the page on which a poem is written is a reproduction of the night sky. In Eielson the movement between appearing and disappearing is mimicked by the references to day and night. The act of writing corresponds, on a smaller scale, to these events. It illuminates like the daytime but it also conceals since the attention of the reader is set upon the text and not what the text is referring to. In order for language to be able to suggest this, Eielson explores the poem as a sculpture made of words. Eielson creates this by appealing to the reader's imagination. It is the approximation to the mystery of presence that is important for the poet, not its presentation. The poem is a sculpture made of words that raises itself in the mind of the reader that appears and disappears as the reading goes on. Thus the image suggested by the poem is that of reading itself. It is because of this that the glimpses of the mystery may be evoked. In this context what stands at the basis of Eielson's poetic language is the problem posited by what De Certeau's called the opening of 'an absence of correspondence between things and words'. This is the distance, the proximity, of which Eielson speaks.

Language and writing are for Eielson not the synthesising structures of thought, but an action among others in the world. Thinking of the poet's view of reality from a Zen perspective, it is consequential to

³⁵⁵ Stephan Mallarmé, 'Un coup de dés', in pp. 455-477.

³⁵⁶ Haroldo de Campos, *Galaxias*, 2nd edn (Sao Paulo: Editora 34, 2004); Augusto de Campos, 'o pulsar', in *VV*, p. 242.

quote the words of D. T. Suzuki about Zen and the everyday which have striking parallels with Eielson's poetics:

La pregunta ¿Qué es el Zen? es a la vez fácil y difícil de responder. Es fácil porque no hay nada que no sea Zen. Si coloco mis dedos en una determinada posición, eso es Zen. Si me siento todos los días en silencio, sin pronunciar palabra, también eso es Zen. Todo lo que digo o hago es Zen y todo lo que dejo de decir o hacer es, igualmente Zen. Veo como las flores se abren en el jardín o como los pájaros cantan en el bosque, y allí está el Zen. Las palabras no son necesarias para explicar el Zen, pues está ya en el interior de cada uno, antes de haberlas pronunciado.³⁵⁷

I do not pretend to prove the influence of Zen doctrine in Eielson's conception of poetic language; however, it seems clear to me that in this continual presence lies the basis of the issue of correspondence between things and words. The experience of reality, of existence, does not depend on language. Language is an exteriority that seeks to name the experience after this one has passed and therefore remains external to that experience:

Porque si la palabra ha perdido su aureola sagrada (como el poeta), en cambio ha reconquistado su máximo valor, su máxima juventud, limitándose *únicamente a subrayar nuestros más perfectos y profundos momentos* de amor, de plenitud o de dolor... signifiquen mucho o no signifiquen nada.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Daizetz T. Suzuki, quoted in Bodadilla, *El uso material y musical en la poesía de Jorge Eduardo Eielson*, p. 74.

³⁵⁸ Eielson, 'Palabras de hoy, poesía de mañana', in *AP*, pp. 498-500 (pp. 499-500).

For William Rowe 'subrayar nuestros más perfectos y profundos momentos' is a key to Eielson's ideas about the poem as a record.³⁵⁹ Poetry records those moments but it does not make them happen:

En la poesía como en la vida
Lo principal (hay que ser inteligente)
No es lo que se queda
Sino lo que se va ('Arte poética I', p. 270)

We find the same subject in the following lines:

Que somos todos poetas
No cabe la menor duda
Y no sólo los humanos
Sino también el cocodrilo
Las hormigas y los monos
[...]
Y que lo que ellos buscan
Sin escribir nunca nada
Ni llamarse poetas
Se llama simplemente
Poesía ('Que todos somos poetas', pp. 212-213)

What we do naturally in our everyday lives is considered the true act of creation. It is in faithfulness to this that he chose to lead his life as he expressed it in his essay 'Saber existir': 'me basta con considerer sagrado cada acto de mi vida y hacer de mi existencia un homenaje a la creación.'³⁶⁰ But Eielson did not set out to make a straightforward record of everyday life, such as some of the poetry of the North American

³⁵⁹ 'Sólo silencio', p. 13.

³⁶⁰ Eielson, in *Nu/do*, p. 375.

Objectivists set out to do for example.³⁶¹ By adopting a view of the poem as an object, or a quasi-object, Eielson circumvented the external character of language by making it internal to the process of writing, which is internal and therefore addressing the poem's possible existence as an object in the world. Eielson was not using language as a synthesiser simultaneous to the experience but rather setting the poem as a different object in a field of relations with other objects. The experience of writing the poem and the experiences external to the poem did not have conflicting natures. We can corroborate this in the fact that 'communication' was not, for Eielson, a necessity for an effective work of art:

En la idea que personalmente tengo del arte, "decir" no significa necesariamente "comunicar". Es por eso que sobre todo he recurrido a la poesía escrita—que circunda más estrictamente al silencio del decir, del escribir y de la lectura misma—y a las imágenes abstractas, que no comunican explícitamente nada sino más bien algo que va más allá de todo lenguaje, y que, por lo tanto, aun si quedamente, están diciendo mucho.³⁶²

By not having communication as the main goal of creation, which would mean that the poem's ultimate motive is the idea or concept being communicated, Eielson is free to place an object in the world, whether a poem or a canvas, to which the reader/viewer would primarily relate.

But the problem is that language lacks a physical reality.³⁶³ This is addressed by the series *papel*, in which we find photographed individual sheets of paper with typed words. Some of them read 'papel agujereado

³⁶¹ The poets usually associated with this group are: William Carlos Williams, George Oppen, Charles Renzikoff, Louis Zukofsky; Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, eds., *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999).

³⁶² Eielson, 'La escalera infinita', in *Nu/do*, pp. 19-22 (p. 19).

³⁶³ It is worth pointing out that the original use of the quipus was as a mnemonic technique. Thus in Eielson the knot gives a physical existence to memory, where as language had to go several times over the possible variables. See *Nu/do*, p. 133.

con cinco palabras' which is a pierced piece of paper with the text composed of five words 'papel aguggerado con cinco palabras', or 'papel rayado', a striped sheet of paper with those two words, and so forth.³⁶⁴ *Papel* then becomes the silent presence of language in the world. It circumvents utterance as the concretisation of language in the world as we saw in the chapter on Oliverio Girondo. In this work there is no need for a voice to give reality to the work since it already has a real physical presence: sheets of paper and typewriter ink. Another significant example of this type of work is 'esta silla de madera es de papel'. The image of a wooden chair is challenged by the text that clarifies that it is actually the image of a wooden chair printed on paper and therefore it is not made of wood but of paper. It is impossible not to think here of Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (fig. 14). Painted in the late 1920s, this radical exploration of image and object became an emblem of surrealism, and a radical attack on the visual and linguistic orders. Eielson, in an homage to Magritte, directs the reader's attention to the materiality of the page. The presence of the chair is the paper. In this way, Eielson is not trying to represent a wooden chair, he is trying to *present* a chair made of paper that represents a wooden chair. He is drawing the reader's attention to the representational nature of language as a limitation and potential.

Language is not able to recreate existence as other media can, such as sculpture. But Eielson, by using different media, and erasing the boundaries between them is trying to circumvent the limitations of each one in order to recreate an organic vision of existence. Jean-Luc Nancy in his essay 'Res Extensa' writes that there are some sculptures where matter seems to be pressing to occupy a place in space:

An expression that would literally be ex-expression: material pressed to the surface, pushing itself outward, making space for itself and

³⁶⁴ Eielson, *Poesía escrita*, ed. with a prologue by Ricardo Silva Santisteban (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1976), pp. 291-301.

thereby pushing some other material out of the way [...] An expression that would be, first and foremost, an extension or expansion, and perhaps, ultimately an expulsion.³⁶⁵

I believe that it is possible to think about a similar impulse in Eielson's work, for two reasons. First, the impulse comes from the inside of the work; second, there is a conception of the mass of the sculpture that is taking over some space in reality. In Eielson the matter of his works is extended over space. What I have in mind is his work with fabrics and some performance pieces. There is common ground in most of them. Each becomes a presence of existence which holds within itself a centre, unseen by the spectator but suggested by the form itself. This is how quipus can be read: a flat stretch of canvas twisted and knotted until it becomes a solid object. They did not begin as already solid objects. They were flexible and thin surfaces that by twisting upon them selves acquired volume. This is the case of the installation *sul volo degli uccelli e sugli annodamenti* based on Leonardo Da Vinci's codex on the flight of birds and on knots. Of this piece Eielson states that 'la instalación es auto-referencial y tautológica, puesto que los nudos descritos en el texto están hechos con el mismo texto.'³⁶⁶ (fig. 15) In the present context is significant to highlight the tautological nature of the installation, since the codex *becomes a presence* in the physical mass of the knot instead of only making reference to the ideas about knots through the text. The representation of abstract ideas on knots becomes a concrete presence. This is what is crucial about Eielson's non-linguistic work: it is a recreation of the mystery of existence. And as Leonardo's codex testifies the limits between the text and the object are blurred.

Eielson's visual work plays on some of the same concepts as the poetry, such as the dichotomies of exterior and interior, seen and

³⁶⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Res Extensa', in *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, ed. by Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 166-170 (p. 166).

³⁶⁶ Eielson, *El diálogo infinito*, p. 49.

unseen. In *Proliferación* (see fig. 16), the idea of an expansion from a hidden centre becomes manifest. The familiar symbol of the chair is present. This time not empty but covered under an immense growth of knotted fabric. This piece links back to the lines 'mi corazón/ crece y crece como un tumor de terciopelo' from 'La sonrisa de Leonardo es una rosa cansada' (pp. 246-248). In *Proliferación* the viewer encounters a mass of textiles of almost human size. The reference to man is not only in the size of the knot but on the chair. *Proliferación* implies an expansion over space from an unseen centre. The fabric is not touching the ground, but it is firmly placed on the chair. If the chair is for Eielson a symbol of melancholy, and melancholy is related to a void, then what *Proliferación* could be trying to indicate is the growth from nothingness of this tumour-like mass. The nothingness that we cannot see, although we can imagine it since if we unravelled the fabric we would be left with a formless empty cloth, is what lies at the centre of this material concentration. This connection to the obscure internal reality of the mass links back with Eielson's idea about poetry, and I again quote Eielson on the poetry of Martín Adán: 'la poesía echa raíces en las tinieblas, es verdad, pero se orienta hacia la luz'.³⁶⁷

These works are enigmatic. An enigma is what draws attention to presence but about which there is neither reason nor explanation clearly visible. It is open and yet closed, like those oxymora that I discussed previously. The performance *Paracas* of 1974 is another example of these sets of plays between opposite dimensions. From the picture we can see that it is clearly a human figure under the canvas. But the more we observe the stills the more it becomes unfamiliar. After a while it is not the human figure that we see but the moving canvas, the bulk of fabric that seems to want to rupture into our reality. There is something underneath convulsing under our very eyes. It does not really matter if it is a man or a woman, it is a mystery taking a mass; it is a mystery

³⁶⁷ Eielson, Martín Adán, in *Nu/do*, p. 83.

becoming present, pushing itself into reality and making itself be seen. I believe that it is possible to create a link between *Paracas* and other performances like *La escalera infinita* and *Dormir es una obra maestra*. The association is based on the hidden figures and sleep. Sleep as the connection with the subconscious, with the hidden forces of dreams. Sleep as an act that we cannot see, that takes place on the dark side of existence. The sleeper is the image of duality, the external figure and the internal activity.³⁶⁸ The ladder at the centre points to an overall theme of connections. The knotted fabrics tie both realities represented by the hidden figure at the centre and the sleeping figure on the bed, while the ladder—made up of several short ladders tied up with white rope or canvas—link the sky with the ground just as the vertical line suggested by the poem 'esta vertical proviene de Alpha Centauro.' Things, acts, elements tied and bound into the complex knot of existence. The figure of the knot itself twists in and out to form its own structure. The tread we see from a certain angle disappears into the twisted mass only to appear, after a trajectory unseen by us, fragmentarily on the other side. It is only fragments that we see, although from the totality of the knot we know that the fragments continue coiling inside, forming the mass of presence from a centre that we cannot see.

The way in which Eielson had the dichotomy of seen/unseen very much present in his creative process is made evident with the *Tríptico* of 1993 (fig 17). The two flanking canvases are displayed back to front, revealing alternating halves of their wooden frames. The central panel is right to front and it presents a fully framed canvas. What we have here is a clear play between the seen and the unseen. Eielson is brining the unseen to the forefront. He is reversing the tables and showing the back of the framed canvas. He is creating a dynamic rhythm between the opposite dimensions; a dynamic interplay between both sides of the frame. *Tríptico* suggests movement; from left to right and vice versa, and

³⁶⁸ Pierre Carrique, *Rêve, vérité: essai sur la philosophie du sommeil et de la veille* ([Paris]:Gallimard, 2002), pp. 362-371.

from back to front and vice versa. With this work in mind, it makes perfect sense that critics have related Eielson's preoccupations about the hidden dimensions of the work with another artist who worked with the transgression of the 'accepted' space of the work, the Argentinean Lucio Fontanta.³⁶⁹ His slashed canvases and his explorations of the surface of the canvas are similar to Eielson *Paisajes infinitos de la cosa del Perú*. In his slashed canvases—the *Concetto spaziale* series—deal also with the crossing of limits between the canvas as body holding an interior dimension (fig. 18). What that dimension in itself holds or how it is, is not the question; the issue is to address it, to acknowledge its existence. I believe that this acknowledgement of particular existences is essential to Eielson's poetics. It is through this that he is able to envision the intrinsic connections between things. For Eielson, to live is to exist in a world of connections.

In the poems and works that I have discussed here there is a common thread: the manifestation of presence. This is the connection with the other two chapters, Gironde and Concrete poetry, in their own particular ways, are also concerned with the presence of the poem in the world. Eielson's paradigm, the knot, is an unavoidable image to close this chapter. It concentrates both the idea of a silent, ineffable, mysterious centre to which we have access because it has a form, the material form of the knot. This brings him very close to the mystical tradition, particularly with San Juan de la Cruz for whom the poem was a *façade* that concealed the formless mystical experience.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ Canfield, 'Una biografía artística y literaria', in *Nudos y asedios críticos*, pp. 17-30 (p. 22).

³⁷⁰ Antonio Ochoa, 'The Poetics of Inaccessibility: San Juan de la Cruz and the Limits of Language' (unpublished Master of Letters thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 73-74.

CONCRETE POETRY: THE POEM IN THE WORLD

More than Oliverio Girondo or Jorge Eduardo Eielson, it is the Concrete poetry movement that managed to fuse in one object the dichotomy of space and time. While Girondo still suggested an internal subjective space, a space that had to be activated by the reader's imagination in order to open the virtual space between the poet and the world, and Eielson explored the limitations and connections of different art forms in order to suggest the arbitrariness of spatial conceptions, it was the concrete poetry project who proposed a new poetic form which could exist as an actual concrete object in the world. A concrete poem is not only a text but an object in its own right precisely because it not only exists in time but since it also occupies space.

The moment the verse enters into crisis at the end of the nineteenth century, space surfaces as a problem in poetry.³⁷¹ For Haroldo de Campos 'no século XIX houve um processo de emancipação da linguagem poética' that resulted in the objectification of poetic language.³⁷² This objectification in its turn allowed for a direct and careful consideration of poetry from within the poem; that is, the poem became a self-reflexive mechanism. The starting point of crisis of poetry and objectification of poetic language is Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés*.³⁷³ In that poem Mallarmé links the spatial disposition of the commercial advertisements and the newspaper to the poet's creative possibilities. For

³⁷¹ Mallarmé treats this subject directly in 'Crise de vers', in *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 360-368.

³⁷² Haroldo de Campos, 'Comunicação na poesia de vanguarda', in *A arte no horizonte do provável e outros ensaios*, 4th edn (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1977), pp. 131-154 (p. 150).

³⁷³ Mallarmé, 'Un coup de dés', in *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 455-477.

example, the narrative breaking off mid way and continuing several pages further on, and the simultaneous appearance of several narrative strands. Haroldo de Campos quotes Walter Benjamin on *Un coup de dés*: "Mallarmé reelaborou pela primeira vez as tensões gráficas do reclame na figuração da escrita".³⁷⁴ And in Brazilian literature it was Sousândrade, who in his *O inferno de Wall Street*, used, twenty years before Mallarmé, the fragmentation of the newspaper to form his poem.³⁷⁵ But this transformation from the verse line to the consideration of space as a guiding principle of poetic composition is far from superficial since it affects the very bases of the organisation of language:

Mallarmé é um *syntaxier*, um arrojado subversor da sintaxe. O poema constelar, na disseminação da forma, rompe a clausura da estrutura fixa e estrófica, dispersa a medida tradicional do verso (e nisto indica, para o Derrida da *Gramatologia*, a ruptura da clausura metafísica do Ocidente, regida pelo modelo épico-aristotélico e pela linearidade da concepção clássica-ontológica da história).³⁷⁶

The spatial revolution indicates the possibility of a shift in modern poetry towards a use of language based on speech and its socio-historical context, in stead of a metaphysical superstructure that would grant meaning to words. Space in poetry becomes a symptom of modern communication of knowledge and culture. And it has as one of its clearest examples the international concrete poetry movement that began simultaneously in Brazil and in Switzerland in the mid 1950s.³⁷⁷ Sao Paulo's Noigandres group of concrete poetry was originally intergraded by

³⁷⁴ Haroldo de Campos, 'Poesia e modernidade: da morte da arte à constelação. O poema pós-utópico', in *O arco-íris branco: ensaios de literatura e cultura* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1997), pp. 243-269 (p. 258).

³⁷⁵ Haroldo de Campos, 'Comunicação na poesia de vanguarda', p. 151.

³⁷⁶ Haroldo de Campos, 'Poesia e modernidade', p. 260.

³⁷⁷ Victor Pineda, 'Speaking about Genre: the Case of Concrete Poetry', in *ubuweb* <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/pineda.html>> [accessed 20 August 2007]. For the present analysis I will concentrate on the work of the Brazilians, although I will make brief references to other concrete poets.

Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos.³⁷⁸ The term Noigandres comes from Ezra Pound's canto XX.³⁷⁹ For the Brazilian group the word came to signify experimentation and innovation, but also research and inquiry into different aspects of culture and knowledge such as philosophy, linguistics, semiotics and theory of music. The adopted name was given to their journal which first appeared in 1952. Four years later other poets joined the group, such as Ronaldo Azeredo, Ferreira Gullar and Wladimir Dias.

Concrete poetry approximates design—understood as the conjunction between the arts and architecture and engineering—because the concrete poem is 'constructed' in time *and* space: 'for the poets of the Noigandres group, the concept of "concrete" was taken in an architectural sense: a structural material of "endless expressive possibilities".'³⁸⁰ Concrete poetry considers words to have three dimensions: semantic content, oral-acoustic, and graphic-spatial.³⁸¹ These three are usually referred to as the 'verbivocovisual' reality of the concrete poem.³⁸² Severo Sarduy writes that 'la poesía concreta: no una serie de versos más o menos pretenciosos y ridículos, sino una cosa semejante a un dibujo, a un diagrama'.³⁸³ A diagram that concentrates several levels of meaning which are set in motion through an active and engaged reading. Sarduy later on concludes: 'el poeta [concreto] se convierte en un *diseñador del significado*'.³⁸⁴ This definition weaves together the elements of form—shape and structure—with the semantic content of language. The concrete poem is very precise in the way it is arranged on the page. To the extent that the poem is open to several

³⁷⁸ Haroldo de Campos, 'De la poesía concreta a *Galaxias* y *Finismundo*, 40 años de actividad poética en Brasil', trans. by Carmen Salas y Rodolfo Mata, *Vuelta*, 177 (1991), 19-27.

³⁷⁹ H. de Campos, 'De la poesía concreta a *Galaxias* y *Finismundo*', p. 20; Ezra Pound, 'Canto XX', *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1970; repr. 1995), pp. 89-95 (pp. 89-90).

³⁸⁰ A. S. Bessa, 'Architecture versus Sound in Concrete Poetry', *ubuweb*, <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/bessa.html>> [accessed 15 August 2007].

³⁸¹ H. de Campos, 'Olho por olho a olho un', in *TPC*, pp. 46-48 (p. 46).

³⁸² A. de Campos, H. de Campos, D. Pignatari, 'plano-piloto para poesia concreta', *TPC*, pp. 156-158 (p. 157).

³⁸³ Severo Sarduy, '¿Sabe usted lo que es "concretud"?', in *Antología*, prologue by Gustavo Guerrero (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), pp. 240-242 (p. 240).

³⁸⁴ Sarduy, '¿Sabe usted lo que es "concretud"?', p. 241.

distinct approximations. A concrete poem can be seen as pure structure or form, as text or sound, as all of the above.

In the concrete poem time and space combined create a hybrid, opening the situation of the poem to both the reading subject and the objective world. We can think of the use and design of typography and its corresponding position on the page. These two elements have precise intentions of communication; in concrete poetry it never is just typography or just design. Whether the poem is located at the centre of the page, or at the bottom, in the far right corner or on the left; whether typography is in colour or bold or italic, its size: all carries meaning. Concrete poetry relates to its counterpart, concrete art, in that the disposition of the poem or words on the page are thought of as forms as much as words with a semantic charge.³⁸⁵ Ultimately this idea of design connects concrete poetry with advertising in its guise of fast and direct communication, just as the newspaper had affected the poetic codifications of Sousândrade and Mallarmé in the nineteenth century.

The need to establish a poetic enterprise that would have communication as one of its goals comes from the social and historical responsibility to reintegrate the poem into daily existence in a growing urban centre like Sao Paulo:

Brazilian concrete poetry also shared with modern architecture ideas that run from the broad social concerns of modernism—such as utopia, utilitarianism, and sanitation—to technical and stylistic matters involving structure, modules, form, and repetition.³⁸⁶

The Noigandres group assumed itself as a conscious heir to certain movements of the historical avant-garde and Brazilian modernism. Their

³⁸⁵ Anna Maria Belluzzo, 'Ruptura e Arte Concreta', in *Arte Construtiva no Brasil: Coleção Adolpho Leirner*, ed. by Aracy Amaral (São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos/DBA Artes Gráficas, 1998), pp. 95-141.

³⁸⁶ A. S. Bessa, 'Architecture versus Sound in Concrete Poetry', *ubuweb*, <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/bessa.html>> [accessed 15 August 2007].

shared goal was to edify a poetic structure that could suggest a different consideration of reality, as well as of poetry itself, and thus have more of a chance to impact reality through the minds of the people:

Sem esse “principio-esperança”, não como vaga abstração, mas como expectativa efetivamente alimentada por uma prática prospectiva, não pode haver vanguarda entendida como movimento. O trabalho em equipe, a renúncia às particularidades em prol do esforço coletivo e do resultado anônimo, é algo que só pode ser movido por esse motor “elpídico”, do grego *elpis* (expectativa, esperança). [...] Vanguarda, enquanto movimiento, é busca de uma nova linguagem comum, de uma nova *koiné*, da linguagem reconciliada, portanto, no horizonte de um mundo transformado. Nos anos 50, a poesia concreta brasileira pôde entreter esse projeto de uma linguagem ecumenical: os novos bárbaros de um país periférico, repensando o legado da poesia universal e usurpando-o sob a bandeira “descentrada” (porque “ex-céntrica”) da “razão antropofágica”.³⁸⁷

The peripheral writing of the Noigandres group makes a critical reconsideration of Western culture based on the reorganisation of the basic structures of language. This is comprehensive analysis of great scale through which the cultural and artistic traditions from which they emerged are revaluated. The new ways of organising the poem set forth by Mallarmé and the avant-garde movements of the beginnings of the twentieth century gave them a starting platform for these inquiries. In poetry the end of linear poetry and the new conceptions for the organisation of the poem based on space allowed them to take into account the extra-linguistic elements of a text in the process of communication. This new conception sees the materiality of the poem

³⁸⁷ Haroldo de Campos, ‘Poesia e Modernidad’, p. 266.

within the space of the page, not like pattern poetry where the poem copies an external object but as a form that is isomorphic to the external situation. For example E. E. Cummings's poem 'loneliness' (1958) where the second 'l', because of the spatial fragmentation of the word, is left isolated in the middle of the page:

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This poem recreates or 'maps-out' the structure of the emotion taking place, the loneliness and isolation of the individual emphasised by the 'l' but also by the only word we can read at first glance 'one'. For Décio Pignatari Cummings manages to create 'gesticulações expressionistas' through the spatial disposition of typography that corresponds to the feeling being communicated in the poem.³⁸⁹

Concrete poetry also considers language as an object that speaks of itself that opens a new awareness about the critical possibilities of poetry; critical in the sense of integrating within the poem reflexions about poetry, and therefore a doubling of poetic language into a meta-

³⁸⁸ E. E. Cummings, *Complete poems 1913-1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 673.

³⁸⁹ D. Pignatari, 'Poesia concreta: pequena marcação histórico-formal', *TPC*, pp. 62-70 (p. 63).

language that could be itself poetic not through discourse as it was evident in *Un coup de dés* but within the structure of the poem itself. Even though the Noigandres poets saw the revolutionary spirit for a new poetry in some poets of the historical avant-garde, their poems were not altering language sufficiently to present a new poetical object which could in its turn relate to the changing world of the times. For example, Apollinaire's ideas on the way thought ought to evolve was not consistent with his poems, which were, according to the Brazilian poets, still following old rules.³⁹⁰ It was not just a question of presentation; to present a poem in the form of a flower when the poem speaks of one is only a superficial change within a set tradition.³⁹¹ For the concrete poets rather than rupture calligrams and pattern poetry were shifts in form within an accepted tradition, for there have been poems in the form of the things of which they speak since the beginnings of written poetry. What was needed was a critical reconsideration of the world and the mediums, e. g. language, with which man thinks about it and lives in it. As was noted in the general introduction to this work, the emergence of the avant-garde in Latin America responded to different historical situations than its European counterpart. The self-consciousness of the language of poetry could very well have facilitated the artistic independence from Europe that the avant-garde represented for Latin America.³⁹²

In concrete poetry language approximates the object it names, and it pulls away from abstraction to enable a proximity with reality. A problem in the poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was exactly that the poet's language was filled with abstractions (as an example we can think of the consideration of the sonnet as the perfect form in Parnassian poetics). The context in which the Noigandres group

³⁹⁰ A. de Campos, 'pontos-periferia-poesia concreta', *TPC*, pp. 17-23 (pp. 20-21).

³⁹¹ Miguel d'Ors, *El caligrama, de Simias a Apollinaire: historia y antología de una tradición clásica* (Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra, 1977).

³⁹² Ana Pizarro, 'Vanguardia y modernidad en el discurso cultural', in *América Latina: Palavra, Literatura e Cultura. Vanguardia e Modernidade*, ed. by Ana Pizarro, 3 Vols (Campinas: UNICAMP, 1995), pp. 19-28 (p. 22).

was formed was a response to the dominating presence of the group of poets known as the *Generation of '45*. This group gathered around the journals *Revista Brasileira de Poesia* and *Orfeu*.³⁹³ A neo-Parnassian, lyric expressionism was the dominating trend in Brazil after the modernist movement of the 1920s.

La Generación de 1945 se rebelaba contra el modernismo del 22 (liderado por Oswald y Mario de Andrade), que se había prolongado hasta los años treintas en poetas como Carlos Drummond de Andrade y Murílio Mendez. Los portavoces del 45 alegaban que nuestros "modernistas" [...] no tenían noción de la forma, eran indisciplinados, descuidados en el oficio de la escritura, en una palabra, *in-formes*. Esa objeción nacía de una idea limitada de lo que es forma; de un concepto de forma que en portugués se designa más bien por la palabra [...] cuyo paradigma es el soneto de perfección parnasiana.³⁹⁴

And although Haroldo de Campos's and Décio Pignatari's first books of poems, *O Auto do Possesso* and *O Carrossel* respectively, were published by *Club de Poesia* which was the vehicle of the *Generation of '45*, soon after they broke away to establish their own forum, *Noigandres*.³⁹⁵ For the concrete poets it was in the conscious objectification of language where the poem became the content proper of itself, in the possibility of interaction between the different structures that form the poem. It was only then that a poem 'conscious' of itself could propose radical transformations in poetry, thought, and reality.

In the present chapter I aim to clarify the relationship between space and time in the concrete poem. This will be the basis for the consideration of the concrete poem as an object. In the concrete poem, I

³⁹³ H. de Campos, 'De la poesía concreta a *Galaxias* y *Finismundo*', p. 19.

³⁹⁴ H. de Campos, 'De la poesía concreta a *Galaxias* y *Finismundo*', p. 19.

³⁹⁵ H. de Campos, 'De la poesía concreta a *Galaxias* y *Finismundo*', p. 19.

think, time and space are joined. This dislocates the existence of the poem out of the reader's mind and into the world. The concrete poem *has*, or rather *is*, a *concrete* presence in the world. In this way, the poetic investigations of Gironde and Eielson connect with concrete poetry since for both of these poets there is a preoccupation about the presence of work of art, to establish the poem in time and space, in the subject and in the world. Both Eielson and Gironde wrote visual poems. Gironde placed his on the first page of his book *Espantapájaros (Al alcance de todos)*, 'Yo no sé nada' (OC, p. 77) and Eielson has two clear examples in his book *Tema y variaciones*, 'Poesía en A mayor' (VEOM, p. 110) and 'Poesía en forma de pájaro' (VEOM, p. 111).³⁹⁶ As I showed in the previous chapter, Eielson continued his research outside the written page in objects that also contained language, such as *Esta tela es un pedazo del universo*. But concrete poetry went a step further than these poets and fused the elements of time and space to create an object which is both a poetic text and a visual work, which exists in the reader's mind and in the world. But I think that there is a clear line that unites the intentions and poetic need of these poets: to cross the boundaries of time and to place the work as an object in the world. This prompts a critical reconsideration about the presence of poetry in the world; to put this problem of presence again on the map in the changing times of modernity. This consideration may not have been their principal aim. However these problems can be deduced from their respective works. They make the reader reconsider the presence of poetry in the world.

In order to properly discuss the ideas proposed in this chapter, I have concluded that it is necessary to engage on almost equal terms with their poetry and with their poetic theories, because the phenomenon of concrete poetry is in this way approached by different sides since the theory forms part of the elemental consciousness of poetic language for

³⁹⁶ Jorge Schwartz, 'Vanguardias enfrentadas: Oliverio Gironde y la poesía concreta', in *Las vanguardias literarias en Argentina, Uruguay y Paraguay (Bibliografía y antología crítica)*, ed. by Carlos García, Dieter Reichardt et al. (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt on Main: Vervuert, 2004), pp. 351-372.

these poets. The theoretical writings enable an awareness that made possible a poetry that proposed a change. However, the writings such as the ones gathered in the volume *Teoria da Poesia Concreta*, are not taken as a basis for interpretation of their poems but rather as a presentation of different perspectives on the problems and aims of their poetic efforts. The name *Noigandres* came to signify poetic innovation and experimentation, yes, but also serious research of the history of literature and culture. Thus their theory, criticism, and translations complement their creative texts. These are all parts of the same effort, the same critical-creative drive. Together they present a clearer picture of their conceptions about poetry.

The present chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I will discuss the issues surrounding the concepts regarding the words as objects. In the second section, I will discuss the issue of the space of the page. The third section deals with the issues of exteriority and communication. These sections will lead us to conclude that the concrete poem is concerned with its presence in the world since it is in this way that real and actual communication can take place.

1

Jean Paul Sartre's differentiation between poetry and prose is well known.³⁹⁷ While the language of prose is considered a medium to communicate a message, the language of poetry is considered a thing. This does not mean the annulment or reduction of the different functions of speech, but as Jakobson wrote: 'the set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language.'³⁹⁸ It seems to me that the conceptions of language

³⁹⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *¿Qué es la literatura?*, trans. by Aurora Bernárdez (Buenos Aires: Lozada, 1950; repr. 2003), pp.57-58

³⁹⁸ Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in *Selected Writings III. Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, ed., with a preface by Stephen Rudy (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), pp. 18-51 (p. 25).

and poetry have to be further clarified in order to fully comprehend the intentions of the concrete poetry project. Furthermore, I think that it is in the consideration of words-as-objects that we may find the element that may clarify this. If words are considered as objects then the poem itself could also be considered as one. This would radically alter the way in which poems are thought of in regards of their place in the cultural reality of man.

The consideration of words-as-objects is found signed by the three poets in the 'plano-piloto para poesia concreta', originally published in *Noigandres* 4 in 1958. There we read the following succinct definition of concrete poetry: 'poesia concreta: tensão de palavras-coisas no espaço-tempo.'³⁹⁹ Does the 'tensão' of the definition refers only to the relationship established by the 'palavras-coisas', or does it also include the relationship established by the 'espaço-tempo'; or, rather, does it refer to the relationship between the two groups—'palavras-coisas' and 'espaço-tempo'—and the relationships within each of the groups. Grammatically 'tensão' refers only to the relationship between 'palavras' and 'coisas'. However, the tension in which these two exist happens in space and time, the space and time of the poem. Without the spatial element this tension could not take place. The tension *is* of a spatial and temporal order. The tension exists because of their proximity in a poem:

O poema concreto aspira a ser: composição de elementos básicos da linguagem, organizados ótico-acusticamente no espaço gráfico por fatores de proximidade e semelhança, como uma espécie de ideograma para uma dada emoção, visando à apresentação direta — presentificação — do objeto.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ *TPC*, pp. 156-158 (p. 156). This definition was coined by Augusto de Campos, who published it in his manifesto 'poesia concreta' in 1957, in *TPC*, pp. 44-45. I quote the manifesto of 1958 because it is made up of statements from the three poets.

⁴⁰⁰ H. de Campos, 'Olho por olho a olho nu', in *TPC*, pp. 46-48 (p. 48).

The object 'presentified' seems to be double: the poem as an object and the corresponding elements in the world: the poem is an ideogram of its referent, the emotion created by an experience.⁴⁰¹ The visual organisation of the poem presents this tension to the viewer. Proximity, the choice of words and their place in the poem create the poetic reality of the concrete poem. The direct presentation of the object is also the direct presentation of the poem as an object. This implies the fusion of the two groups, the 'palavras-cosas' and the 'espaço-tempo'. It is in this fusion that the multi-dimensionality of the concrete poem becomes actualised.

I believe that it is important to address this definition because it has the potential to further clarify one of the major contributions of concrete poetry to modern Western poetry: the place of the poem vis-à-vis the industrialised world. The concrete poem is a product of its times; a critical product conscious of the difficult reality that it intends to ponder and represent. Paulo Franchetti, author of a brief study on concrete poetry theory, only mentions this definition in passing.⁴⁰² The consideration of words-as-objects should be understood in direct connection with the space of the page and the organisation of the poem that becomes possible as a result of such consideration. Partly, the objectification of the poem is possible because its elements are also considered objects. On the other hand, the concrete poem is made in direct relation to its possibilities of being presented as an object. This is a fact for its survival. To be presented or to be able to be presented as an object in the world justifies the poems particular existence. Words can be considered objects because they form relations between them *in* space rather than through the semantic chain of the phrase. Thus, words are made to behave like any other object that would form a pattern with

⁴⁰¹ H. de Campos, 'Olho por olho a olho nu', in *TPC*, pp. 46-48 (p. 46).

⁴⁰² Paulo Franchetti, *Alguns Aspectos da Teoria da Poesia Concreta*, 3rd edn (Campinas: Unicamp, 1993), p. 71; this is also the case of Ramón Xirau, 'Teoría de la poesía concreta de Brasil', in *Entre la poesía y el conocimiento: antología de ensayos críticos sobre poetas y poesía iberoamericanos*, foreword by Adolfo Castañón, ed. by Josué Ramírez and Adolfo Castañón (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), pp. 497-509.

other objects in a particular setting. This is so because the objects within the poem form patterns that form meaning, as much as the poem itself can be set as an object that forms a pattern with other objects. And because of these patterns it is possible to speak of an ideogram of emotions. This is the reason why, I think, it is valid to speak of a presence of the concrete poem. In this sense, words or parts of a word are isolated as units no longer only of semantic meaning but of visual and acoustic values as well. To consider the language of a concrete poem as fragmented is a difficult question, since the 'order' of a word on the chain of a phrase does not have the same organising value in a concrete poem. It is fragmentation in direct comparison to general consensus of the continuity of speech. However the concrete poem is proposing a different set of organising principles that do not necessarily correspond to the semantic chain. For Anna Schaffner, the solution lies in the use of terminology. Fragmentation insofar as the reflection of a 'fragmented' world does not respond accurately to the intentions of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde poets who experimented with the different levels of language:

Language dissection in contrast is to bring about change rather than just to mirror it, it is an interventionist device used to uncover and change thought processes and to heighten awareness by means of deliberately disturbing the conventional order of signs. Moreover, the act of dissection is motivated by the desire to examine the inner structure of the medium, to investigate that which lies behind the surface layer. Language dissection in avant-garde poetry is an analytical tool, a device for probing into the very heart of the language system, for exploring the nature of signs and

for putting in question the conventions which govern their usage.⁴⁰³

Language dissection, then, more than fragmentation, could be a way in which we could analyse what happens in the language of the concrete poem. However, I believe that this perspective continues to be comparative in nature, since it takes as a referent the 'order' of language to be dissected. Dissection implies a whole body, but it is the existence of this whole body which concrete poetry—and some other avant-garde poetics—puts under question.

It is easy to visualise the concept of words-as-objects if we think of a collage.⁴⁰⁴ There we find words or fragments of words cut-out from a newspapers or magazines, which can be easily manipulated on top of a surface as individual independent units (fig. 19). This brings to mind Tristan Tzara's recipe to compose a Dadaist poem.⁴⁰⁵ There are many differences between the Dadaist composition and the use of language in concrete poetry. I will concentrate mainly on two of them. First, Tzara's recipe to make a Dadaist poem is playfully ironic:

Take a newspaper.

Take some scissors.

Choose from this paper an article of the length you want to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Next carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag.

Shake gently.

⁴⁰³ Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Language Dissection in Avant-Garde Poetry: Textual Politics from Cubist to Futurist to Concrete and Digital Poetics (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2006), p. 19.

⁴⁰⁴ I am translating the word 'coisas' for objects in order to emphasise the difference between 'natural' things and man made 'objects'.

⁴⁰⁵ Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love', in *Seven Dada Manifestos*, pp. 31-48 (p. 39).

Next take out each cutting one after the other.

Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.

The poem will resemble you.

And there you are—an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd.

The conceptual and cultural guidelines that dominate the context of concrete poetry theory were not something the Dadaists were concerned with. Dadaism was focused on the loss of meaning that humanity was facing at that time, between the first and second decades of the twentieth century. This included a loss of faith in the institutions which were supposed to demonstrate the heights of Western civilization which at that time was annihilating itself in the First World War. That every single person could write an original poem without any effort except transcribing it from the cut-outs of a sheet of paper indicates that in reality no poem is worth anything: 'Dadá se presenta, pues, como un escepticismo encarnizado, sistemático'.⁴⁰⁶ On the other hand, the Noigandres concrete poetry project was in a large sense based upon a revision of a cultural tradition from which the poets traced their work in a direct line. Indeed, a great percentage of their theory is based upon the tracing of this tradition: Mallarmé, Pound, Cummings, Joyce, in literature; Schoenberg, Webern, Stockhausen in music; Calder, Mondrian in the arts:

A arte da poesia, não tenha uma vivência função-da-História mas se apóie sobre um "continuum" meta-histórico que contemporaniza Homero e Pound, Dante e Eliot, Góngora e Mallarmé, implica a idéia de progresso, não no sentido de hierarquia e valor, mas no de

⁴⁰⁶ Marcel Raymond, *De Baudelaire al surrealismo*, trans. by Juan José Domenchina, 3rd edn (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960; repr. 2002), p. 230.

metamorphose vetoriada, de transformação qualitativa, de culturmorfologia: "make it new".⁴⁰⁷

Haroldo de Campos closes this paragraph with a double reference: 'culturmorfologia' refers to the ethnological theories of Leo Frobenius whose research followed the influence and transformation of different cultures on each other; the second reference is to Ezra Pound, the motto 'Make it new' was his theory of cultural adaptation and the best example of this is Pound's own *Cantos*.⁴⁰⁸ The second difference is that for Tzara the resulting poem is a very personal one that would resemble the individual who performed the experiment. The irony in this formula should not be overlooked. The bourgeois consciousness of a personal and original poem cancels the very possibility of originality and identity because the very notion of the bourgeois is that of conformity; conformity to clear and easy to use guidelines like a recipe to write a poem. However, the 'escepticismo encarnizado' of Dadaism should also not be forgotten when performing a critical reading of this formula. On the one hand Tzara is making fun of its own banality, but on the other he is seriously commenting upon the banality of the structures of Western cultural meaning. The author in concrete poetry tends to be erased. And although it is still the poet who lives the experiences from where the emotion is born and to which the concrete poem functions as a sort of ideogram, the author does not figure as a guiding principle in these

⁴⁰⁷ Haroldo de Campos, 'Poesia e paraíso perdido', in *TPC*, pp. 26-29 (p. 26). The examples could be multiplied. I will cite a few of the following texts in the book where these different artists are mentioned: H. de Campos, 'A obra de arte aberta', pp. 30-33; A. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta', pp. 34-35; D. Pignatari, 'Arte concreta: objecto e objetivo', pp. 39-40; D. Pignatari, 'Nova poesia: concreta', pp. 41-43; A. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta', pp. 44-45; H. de Campos, 'Evolução de formas: poesia concreta', pp. 49-55. Haroldo de Campos wrote the essay 'Poética sincrônica' where he discusses the idea of the evolution and connection of poetic forms that circumvents the diachronic consideration of literary history, in *A arte no horizonte do provável e outros ensaios*, 4th edn (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1977), pp. 205-212; he also treated this subject in connection to Brazilian poetry in 'El secuestro del barroco en la formación de la literatura brasileña: el caso de Gregorio de Mattos', in *De la razón antropológica y otros ensayos*, ed. and trans. by Rodolfo Mata (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2000), pp. 133-184.

⁴⁰⁸ Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935); Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Jean Duvignaud, *El lenguaje perdido: ensayo sobre la diferencia antropológica*, trans. by Hugo Azcurra (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1977), pp.127-128 and 135-143.

poems. The author there takes a secondary role and lets language speak for itself. A 'personal poem' would indicate a return to a romantic and confessional poetry that is very much at odds with their project, particularly during this stage in the history of the group.⁴⁰⁹

There is, however, a similarity between the recipe for making a Dadaist poem and concrete poetry that I would like to point out: both relate to words as small tangible units that can be physically 'manipulated'—from the root of this word relating to the hand. Words in some concrete poems seem to be floating above the page more than being permanently imprinted on it. A clear example of this is the group of poems from Haroldo de Campos 'No a mago do ômega' (XE, nn). Although this is just a visual effect similar to the ones described by Kandinsky in his treatise 'Point and Line to Plane' they do not mean the same thing.⁴¹⁰ While for Kandinsky the picture plane is equivalent to the visual field of the eye, for the concrete poets there is no such natural organisation.⁴¹¹ What I meant to imply with this comparison is not an analysis of concrete poetry based on Kandinsky's observations—an analysis that could prove fruitful in a different context—but to bring to the forefront the importance of the relationship between the elements of a given poem where language, printed words and paper are locked in a relationship in a similar way as Kandinsky thought the tension of lines and points on the surface of the canvas.

Mary Ellen Solt, editor of one of the most comprehensive concrete poetry anthologies, defines a central aspect of its poetics: 'despite the confusion in terminology, though, there is a fundamental requirement which the various kinds of concrete poetry meet: concentration upon the

⁴⁰⁹ Franchetti divides the theoretical writings in three stages that coincide with changes in their practice: 'aquela em que se começa a construir o projecto poético, aquela em que se trata de justificar e defender o projecto e aquela em que se faz mais fraca a coesão do grupo', in *Alguns Aspectos da Teoria*, p. 27.

⁴¹⁰ Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, trans. by Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay (Bloomfield Hills, MI: Cranbrook, 1947).

⁴¹¹ Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 145.

physical material from which the poem or text is made.⁴¹² Although the materiality of the concrete poem also includes sound, at the moment I am considering mainly the visual aspect in connection to the concept of words-as-objects because this is inextricably connected to the space of the poem. Solt is clear, a concrete poem is 'made' more than written. This implies a different consideration of the poem's material: words. These words are not weaved together to form sentences that represent discursive thought but are used as multi-dimensional independent units that incarnate the different aspects of language among which is the representation of thought. At different moments of the theory and manifestos gathered around the volume *Teoria da poesia concreta* the reader finds definitions and conceptualisations of words-as-objects, for example, Augusto de Campos in 'Poesia concreta' explains that:

Em sincronização com a terminologia adotada pelas artes visuais e, até certo ponto, pela música de vanguardia (concretismo, música concreta) diria eu que há uma poesia *concreta*. Concreta no sentido em que, postas de lado as pretensões figurativas da expressão (o que não quer dizer: posto à margem o significado), *as palavras nessa poesia atuam como objetos autônomos*.⁴¹³

For Augusto de Campos at this stage concrete poetry is concrete insofar as the words used in it are considered as autonomous objects like the cut-outs from a collage placed on top of a page. It is no coincidence that Augusto de Campos's explanation opens with this reference to the visual arts. The importance of the visual façade of the concrete poem has been addressed by Eduardo Milán: 'la distinción tan cara a los poetas concretos entre forma orgánica y forma "exterior" o de "fachada" es

⁴¹² Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: a World View*, ed. and intro. by Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 7.

⁴¹³ A. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 34-35 (p. 34). My emphasis.

clave.⁴¹⁴ And it is key because this is the basis for the making of a concrete poem. This will take us later to the idea of the concrete poem as exteriority. This exterior form or façade is the basis for the consideration of the concrete poem as an object that exists outside the reader in the modern socio-historical world. If the conventional poem does not need the physical support of the printed page and can live solely in the mind—memory—of the reader, the concrete poem *depends* on its material existence. Its presence lies outside the reader. It seeks to maintain that distance between them and thus relate to the reader as other objects relate to him: through their exterior form.

Augusto de Campos is very careful in his terminology. He uses the term 'palavras' rather than 'linguagem'. To say that words in concrete poetry act as autonomous objects is not the same as implying that the whole of language is an object. Words as visual, acoustic, and semantic units can be better manipulated. The reason for this is because words are units that are used in our everyday lives. Language refers to a more abstract category that cannot be contained; words belong to language but this one is too undefined and intangible to work with concretely. In this way, the cut-outs from Tzara's Dadaist poem and the words in a concrete poem share in this consideration: they are small objects manipulated on top of a page. This manipulation of words as independent units manages to create unexpected or unreachable forms from a purely semantic conception of writing. Because this manipulation begins with the visual and acoustic forms of the words the probabilities of combination are multiple and innovative, although the potentialities of other aspects of language are in their turn reduced.

Eugen Gomringer in his essay 'The Poem as a Functional Object' speaks of the concrete poem as a 'tile poem'.⁴¹⁵ I find that what

⁴¹⁴ Eduardo Milán, 'Neobarrosos', in *Justificación material: ensayos sobre poesía latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Universidad de la Ciudad de Mexico, 2004), pp. 23-41 (p. 30). In a different essay of the same book Milán traces back the concept of the poem's façade to *Un coup de dés*, a poem of extreme importance for the concrete poets, 'Hablar de Parra', pp. 43-55 (p. 47).

⁴¹⁵ Eugen Gomringer, 'The Poem as a Functional Object', in *ubuweb* <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/gomringer04.html>> [accessed 25 August 2007].

Gomringer calls 'tile' is an intriguing word that merits our attention. This definition yields important information about a particular conception of words and a way of using them in concrete poetry. A tile is a flat, thin slab. It is used to cover surfaces. It is also mobile, like the little tiles in a board of scrabble. Here again it is pertinent to remember that idea of manipulation related to the hand. To refer to words as tiles shows a particular 'mobility' within the space of the poem, as much as to its exterior character emphasised by the defining flatness of a tile. A tile is pure façade, there is no inside. In addition to this, the concept of the tile also shares attributes with the artistic ready-mades insofar as these are objects found by the poet, not created by him, and once set in a different context they become re-signified. According to Gomringer it is from the word as unit that he thinks the construction of the poem: 'I find it wisest to stay with the word, even with the usual meanings of the word.'⁴¹⁶ This reduction or concentration plays to the idea of communication in modernity:

The purpose of reduced language is not the reduction of language itself but the achievement of greater flexibility and freedom of communication (with its inherent need for rules and regulations). The resulting poems should be, if possible, as easily understood as signs in airports and traffic signs.⁴¹⁷

It is in this context that the concrete poem is meant to exist outside the author/reader and outside the book and in relation with other objects in the world. Insofar as the words of a concrete poem are considered 'dislocated' from speech the probability of movement and manipulation of those words is higher. This does not mean that those words do not belong to language and speech—they do. What this means is that the first and foremost consideration of the concrete poet is not to

⁴¹⁶ Gomringer, 'The Poem as a Functional Object'.

⁴¹⁷ Gomringer, 'The poem as a Functional Object'.

create a 'poetic discourse', which could also be said to be 'outside' normal language and speech but that could still be inserted back into it, but rather to create an object that seeks a certain kind of autonomy through the functional use of its elements.

The kind of typography chosen by the poet grants extra-linguistic significance, like in the poem 'luxo' of Augusto de Campos where irony becomes an interplay of meaning (fig. 20). This poem is formed by two words 'luxo' and 'lixo' printed in golden letters. The poem is structured by the repetition of word 'luxo' inside the shape of the word 'lixo' (VV, pp. 119). The repetition of the word in this poem takes the place of the semantic reference of abundance connected to the word 'luxo' which is juxtaposed to the idea of waste. The typography in this poem is very elaborate and ornate creating a sense of opulence while the semantic field goes contrary to that of presentation. Therefore the 'semantic' content of the poem is visually expanded by the colour, shape, and repetition of the word. The slight and yet crucial variation in the second letter of both words 'luxo' and 'lixo', 'u' and 'i', suggests the thin line between something that might be thought good because of its luxurious exterior and yet the actual implications that that object has which are contrary to its appearance. This is a direct commentary on the visual value system of modern Western society. In this poem image and content pull in different directions. The tension lies there. It is also why concrete poetry is more than just appearance.⁴¹⁸ Although at a first glance it is pure form, ultimately it is transforming the semantic content of the poem. The concrete poem is not an inert thing but it has to be interpreted, read actively, in order to release its full potentiality.

The conception of words-as-objects has negative connotations for conservative critics such as Harold Bloom. He writes of two possible conceptions of language:

⁴¹⁸ The opinion that concrete poetry is nothing more than a vacuous and capricious experiment is strongly expressed by Mike Gonzales and David Treece in the chapter 'The Architects of Construction: Poetry and the Politics of Development in Post-war Brazil' in *The Gathering of Voices: Twentieth Century Poetry of Latin America* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 227-266.

Language, in relation to poetry, can be conceived in two valid ways, as I have learned, slowly and reluctantly. Either one can believe in a magical theory of all language, as the Kabbalists, many poets, and Walter Benjamin did, or else one must yield to a thoroughgoing linguistic nihilism.⁴¹⁹

If by 'linguistic nihilism' Bloom means taking full responsibility in the face of language that is no longer justified by any metaphysical superstructures, then I believe that the concrete poets would happily place themselves in the second category. As Augusto de Campos explains: 'a poesia concreta começa por assumir uma responsabilidade total perante a linguagem'.⁴²⁰ It is again to Gianni Vattimo's understanding of nihilism that I turn in order to clearly conceptualise the implications of this rupture. He writes in *Ética de la interpretación*:

La ontología nihilista nietzscheano-heideggeriana ultrapasa la metafísica, principalmente, porque ya no sigue considerando necesario el deber de buscar estructuras estables, fundamentos eternos ni nada semejante, ya que precisamente esto significaría seguir pretendiendo que el ser hubiera de tener aún la estructura del objeto del ente (o hasta de la mercancía, para decirlo en términos marxianos). Esta nueva ontología piensa, por el contrario, que se debe captar al ser como evento, como el configurarse de la realidad particularmente ligado a la situación de una época que, por su parte, es también proveniencia de las épocas que la han precedido.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Harold Bloom, 'The Breaking of Form', in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 1-37 (p. 4).

⁴²⁰ A. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 44-45 (p. 44).

⁴²¹ Gianni Vattimo, *Ética de la interpretación*, trad. de Teresa Oñate, Paidós Studio, 85 (Barcelona: Paidós, 1991), pp. 10-11.

Once any metaphysical superstructures are removed from the poet's relationship with language, language can function in an area easier to manipulate in which history and society are the factors that charge it with meaning: 'aceitando o pressuposto do idioma histórico como núcleo indispensável de comunicação'.⁴²² And since this historical language would also be an event shaped by the reality of an epoch, then concepts such as cultural contamination, cultural morphology and *antropofagia* become part of the reality that the poet must consider as his own: 'apropiación transgresiva e hibridismo (o mestizaje) como práctica dialógica y capacidad de expresar al otro y expresarse a sí mismo a través del otro, bajo la égida de la diferencia'.⁴²³ The idea of *antropofagia* was not that of simply devouring, but of assimilating; assimilating the other's power: 'muerte y vida de las hipótesis. De la ecuación yo parte del *Cosmos* al axioma *Cosmos* parte del yo. Subsistencia. Conocimiento. Antropofagia'.⁴²⁴ The metaphor of ingestion is a search for energy, vital energy. To ingest is not to repeat the other, it is to possess it for one's benefit; the other ceases to exist as such. If Western European culture has merged with the cultural reality of Brazil, then it is the concern of the poet, conscious of his or her historical moment, not to negate that 'foreign' influence but to understand it in order to make it his or her own. What results is an experiment in cultural contamination, like the appropriation of the sonnet in the fifteenth century in Spain or of African art in turn of the twentieth century Paris.

The rupture with those metaphysical superstructures points back to the idea of handling words like a concrete artist would handle the materials for a painting or a sculpture.⁴²⁵ The concrete poet, unlike a

⁴²² A. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta', in *TPC*, p. 44.

⁴²³ Haroldo de Campos, 'Tradición, traducción, transculturación: historiografía y ex-centricidad', trans. by Néstor Perlongher, *Filología*, 22 (1987), 45-53 (p. 47).

⁴²⁴ Oswald de Andrade, 'Manifiesto antropófago', in *Obra escogida*, ed. and intro. by Haroldo de Campos, trans. by David Jackson (Caracas: Ayacucho, 1981), pp. 65-72 (p. 69).

⁴²⁵ Derrida discusses the issues relating to language in the light of this rupture, how language was affected by it in its relationship to Being, Jacques Derrida, 'La retirada de la metáfora', in *La deconstrucción en las fronteras de la filosofía*, trans. and intro. by Patricio Peñalver, Pensamiento Contemporáneo, 2 (Barcelona: Paidós, 1989), pp. 35-75.

Symbolist poet, deals with words almost as construction blocks: 'estas [palavras]—não as sílabas—serão o elemento básico de composição do poema.'⁴²⁶ One of the reasons for the consideration of words-as-objects is connected to their spatial relations on the page more than through the discursive-semantic chain, and the consideration of words-as-building blocks makes this possible. The space of the page becomes a 'campo de atuação dessa "força relacional"' between words.⁴²⁷ This 'força relacional' is that 'tensão' between words and their existence as objects within the poem. The concepts of 'tile' and 'building-block' allow the reader to see that the concrete poem is, or, pretends to be, a direct presentation of words.⁴²⁸ Such direct presentation of words intends to minimise their metaphorical charge insofar as this is related to those metaphysical superstructures. The concrete poem becomes then a presentation, a façade, within a particular epoch's contingencies which is what explains why concrete poetry evolved and transformed continuously throughout the years since it was not an unmovable set of concepts but it responded to as times evolved. And within these contingencies are both sides of the circle of communication: the poet and his times and the reader and his.

These considerations of tension between words-as-objects within the 'field' of the poem will affect the way in which a concrete poem takes form. In this regard, Haroldo de Campos goes as far as to say that in time the differences between the concrete poet and the concrete painter will become less clearly defined.⁴²⁹ As much as the concrete poet works with the semantic content of language, he also bases his composition on the possibilities of the printed matter on the page. Because words considered as objects acquire in their own reality.⁴³⁰ This concept of a poetic reality is particular to the poem, and not as a utopian alternative

⁴²⁶ H. de Campos, 'Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição', in *TPC*, pp. 93-95 (p. 94).

⁴²⁷ H. de Campos, 'Aspectos da poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 96-108 (p.100).

⁴²⁸ This sentence is similar to Pound's directions regarding the first of the three principles of Imagism: 'Direct treatment of the thing', in 'A Restrospect', in *The Literary Essays*, p. 3.

⁴²⁹ H. de Campos, 'Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição', p. 94.

⁴³⁰ H. de Campos, 'Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição', p. 94.

to the socio-historical world. We can see this stemming from the concrete poets' reading of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*, which opened 'as portas de uma nova realidade poética'.⁴³¹ Or rather, we can say retrospectively, that words-as-objects challenged the notions of the immateriality of language proposing that it too had an objective-physical reality separated from the subject, existing in the poem in time and space. The question about the relation between words and the space of the page becomes imperative and fundamental not only within the concrete poem but in relation to the concrete poem as an object as well, since all objects exist in space in relation with other objects to the extent that space itself can be considered the environment created by these relationships rather than as emptiness. It is because of this tension between objects in the space they create and inhabit that the words of a concrete poem can be considered as objects since this tension is what maintains the poem's structure. For example, in Décio Pignatari's *LIFE* as it is published in *Poesia pois é poesia* the reader faces this idea of the place in the world of the printed matter (*PPÉP*, pp. 129-144). I specifically have in mind this edition because each character of the poem is printed on a separate sheet of paper emphasising the physical independence—space and time—of each of them (see fig. 21). This poem is not structured as the simple breaking up of the word 'LIFE'. The first page of the poem is the letter 'I' and not 'L'. The 'I' is placed first because in this way the poem is indicating an evolution of forms as can be appreciated from the images of each letter of the poem. The final symbol, which looks like the Chinese character for sun, holds the forms of all the letters from the poem. In this way it is almost like an Aleph, the Hebrew letter which contains all other letters. In Pignatari's poem this would not mean the relationship with a transcendent power of language, but it means the creative potential of language itself. That contained form is from where all the letters from the poem unfold, but also it has the potential to hold all words and all the

⁴³¹ A. de Campos, 'Pontos—Periferia—Poesia concreta', *TPC*, pp. 17-25 (p. 17).

possible combinations of words like a DNA chain holds the potential to create all forms of life. The poem is also a movement of expansion-contraction-expansion with a variation of speed. While the reader flips through the first letters there is a certain speed—the speed with which we can flip to the next page and look at the letter. Then it is the symbol which contracts the previous four letters/pages. And the next page is the word 'LIFE' which we read at once, like Gomringer's poetic traffic sign. This movement between expansion and contraction, made possible by the form of the poem, is what suggests the insight of the poem: vital rhythm, concentration of meaning in symbols, proliferation of forms.

The concrete poet and the reader of concrete poetry do not deal only with the graphic symbols of speech but with the graphic reality of typography and the page, which also refers to speech, as Lissitzky wrote:

To-day we have two dimensions for the word. As a sound it is a function of time, and as a representation it is a function of space. The coming book must be both. In this way the automatism of the present-day book will be overcome; for a view of life which has come about automatically is no longer conceivable to our minds and we are left suffocating in a vacuum. The energetic task which art must accomplish is to transmute the emptiness into space, that is into something which our minds can grasp as an organised unity.⁴³²

Space is organised by man, it is not emptiness. Like other objects in the world with which man organises space, the words in the poem organise its own space. The poet and the reader do not think of the words in a concrete poem in the same way as they would those in a more traditional one. The concrete poem as an object defies the characteristics of a traditional poem on the pages of a book. A concrete poem is closer

⁴³² El Lissitzky, 'Our book', in *For the voice*, ed. by Patricia Railing (London: British Library, 2000), pp. 134-137 (p. 134).

to a poster than to the regular printed page of a book. The extreme of this objectification of words are the poems of Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, whose poem 'order', for example, is made of carved words in stones so as to make them part of the landscape (see fig. 22).⁴³³ This poem is not a sculpture and we would be wrong in considering it so just because its material is stone rather than paper and ink. The words in this poem are not letters that form a three dimensional sculpture as in the steel constructions of Mathias Goeritz.⁴³⁴ In Finlay's 'order' the letters are carved on materials that defy the individual concepts of books and reading. The blocks of stone and the letters are the poem but in this particular case these act directly within the landscape that assimilates the poem as part of itself. Finlay is 'organising' space, and the words of the poem have a physical presence in the landscape. The seemingly haphazard placing of the stones creates a human-made axis that redefines the landscape based on the possible relationships stemming from the position of the stones: 'el eje es una línea imaginaria con la cual todos los puntos de una superficie, un volumen o un espacio mantienen una determinada relación'.⁴³⁵ In this particular case the seemingly random disposition of the stones and their relation to the horizon and the hills. Ideas of order and disorder are questioned prompted by the natural order of the landscape and the voluntary disorder of the stones—which also suggest the passing of time, as if they were ruins, as if man's order will become beautifully disordered with the passing of time. In this poem time and space are fused together, proposing a new way to ponder the reality of words, as Tom Leonard wrote: 'language itself is an object in

⁴³³ Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Order', in www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com <www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian_hamilton_finlay.html> [accessed 31 May 2007]

⁴³⁴ I have 'The Echo of Gold' particularly in mind, in Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, p. 192.

⁴³⁵ Sigfried Giedion, *El presente eterno: los comienzos de la arquitectura, una aportación al tema de la constancia y el cambio*, trans. by Joaquín Fernández Bernaldo de Quirós, Alianza Froma, 22 (Madrid: Alianza, 1981; repr. 1997), p. 421.

the world—the world is not an object in it.⁴³⁶ 'Order' by Finlay exemplifies this quite literally.

For example, Augusto de Campos explored the presentation of three-dimensional poems in his *Poemobiles* where the text adapts itself to the transformations of the surface on which it is printed (see fig. 23). He also explored these issues in the installation of his poem 'cidadecitycité' in the Sao Paulo biennale of 1987 where he turned the poem into a long three-dimensional sign placed on top of a wall (see fig. 24).⁴³⁷ Here, like in Finlay's 'order', the poem plays an architectural role: it organises and transforms space and at the same time proposes a reconsideration of language from its physical presence within that space. It invades the space outside the book. The poem becomes part of everyday existence, it is part of the public environment. Reading as a private exercise and experience breaks open, it takes over like those traffic signs Gomringer speaks of. The idea is to have direct and constant access to the poem as part of a public space that would be conducive to this.

These examples, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Augusto de Campos, are an extreme of what the concrete poets of Sao Paulo called the evolution of forms: 'a poesia concreta, tal como a compreendemos, é uma resultante de um estudo sistemático de formas.'⁴³⁸ In this way, the evolution of forms that started as a reconsideration of how poetry should function taking into account all the elements that form a poem—visual, acoustic, semantic—starting with Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* led to the objectification of words and the reconsideration of space as an integral part of the poem. As Augusto de Campos wrote, Mallarmé opened the doors for a new poetic reality, which lead to a reconsideration of the

⁴³⁶ Tom Leonard, 'The Locust Tree in Flower, and why it had Difficulty Flowering in Britain', in *Intimate Voices: Selected Work 1965-1983* (Buckfastleigh, Devonshire: Etruscan, 2003), pp. 104-115 (p. 115).

⁴³⁷ A. de Campos, 'cidadecitycité', in *Augusto de Campos: Site Oficial* <www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/poemas.htm> [accessed 31 May 2007]; the text of 1963 is found in *VV*, p. 114.

⁴³⁸ H. de Campos, 'Evolução de formas: poesia concreta', *TPC*, pp. 49-55 (p. 53).

place of the poem.⁴³⁹ This new poetic reality, which until then had been confined between the pages and covers of a book or to the mind of the reader/listener, spilled out into the world not as speech but as presence; i.e. the poem is no longer only made of speech but also with the objects with which it can acquire an objective existence.

But the presence of the poem in the world is not only possible when we are dealing with three-dimensional examples. The idea of the space of the page and the organisation of the poem leads to a reconfiguration of the relationships between objects, among them the poem on the page. It is a proposition not only for a new kind of poetry but for a new kind of reading. Reconfiguring our reading habits leads to the suggestion of a possible reconfiguration of our relationship with the world. Rather than limiting their research to the production of poetic forms, the concrete project opens up to experimentation in different arts: 'situar-se em correlação de pesquisas com a música e as artes visuais realmente criativas, frente à problemática da invenção de formas'.⁴⁴⁰ The invention of forms implies a critical relationship with the past, thus it also implies a critical relationship with the present. Therefore critical thinking becomes—for the concrete poet and for the reader of concrete poetry—in an ethical activity.

In the context of the poem as a 'campo de atuação dessa "força relacional"' it is necessary to look back to one of the Noigandres group's major influences: Ernest Fenollosa's essay on the Chinese character.⁴⁴¹ I must begin by clarifying the position of Haroldo de Campos and the rest of the group in relation with the concept of the ideogram. Haroldo de Campos writes about Fenollosa's method that apart from all its impact on the surface as an eminently cathartic function and clearer of obstructions for perception, what is really transcendent for poetry in his essay is not his pictographic argument—ideogram as painting of ideas via things—but

⁴³⁹ A. de Campos, 'Pontos—periferia—poesia concreta', *TPC*, pp. 17-25 (p.17).

⁴⁴⁰ H. de Campos, 'Evolução de formas: poesia concreta', *TPC* p. 53.

⁴⁴¹ Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. by Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1936).

his argument about relationships—the ideogram insofar as relational process, insofar as structural metaphor.⁴⁴² This concept understood in this way will be key as things by themselves are not as important as the relationships into which they enter and what is suggested by this encounter. It is in these relationships where meaning is created, where the kind of poems that I am discussing come into being, where different planes of significance come together to form the poem based on their spatial relationship more than on the syntactical order of the phrase.⁴⁴³ The tension between the elements in a poem becomes the source of its unity. Fenollosa wrote that 'in reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their fate.'⁴⁴⁴ The Chinese characters become *as* things within the poem which are engaged in a tense relationship: 'two things added together do not produce a third thing but suggest some fundamental relation between them.'⁴⁴⁵ And it is this tension created by their proximity that suggests ideas, images, and feelings as actions; i.e. something that takes place through space and time. Not because the images created in this poetry are more accurate or clear than the ones created by Western languages, but because, according to Fenollosa, a large number of Chinese primitive characters 'are a short hand for actions and processes.'⁴⁴⁶ In Chinese poetry there is no separation between the action and the subject performing it as is the case with English, for example. This happens due to the structural need for the copula, the link between the subject and the action performed. In concrete poetry that type of verb is mostly discarded and words themselves take on the characters of actions and processes as was clear in Pignatari's 'LIFE' where characters themselves

⁴⁴² Haroldo de Campos, 'Ideograma, anagrama, diagrama: uma leitura de Fenollosa', in *Ideograma: lógica, poesia, linguagem*, ed. by Haroldo de Campos, 4th edn (Sao Paulo: Universidade de Sao Paulo, 2000), pp. 23-107 (p. 66).

⁴⁴³ This form has interesting parallelisms with Frank's spatial form since it is based on the relationships between elements in space that can be apprehended by the reader. The differences would be that a concrete poem can be apprehended at one glance and that it actually uses the space of the page to create meaning.

⁴⁴⁴ Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character*, p. 9.

⁴⁴⁵ Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character*, p. 10.

⁴⁴⁶ Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character*, p. 9.

suggest a process and are also the main actors of that process. The concrete poet sees 'a palavra em si mesma—campo magnético de possibilidades—como un objeto dinâmico.'⁴⁴⁷ I do not intend to suggest that in concrete poetry words 'work out their fate' but rather that the words-as-objects in a concrete poem have a similar relationship between themselves as the Chinese characters as described by Fenollosa:

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points, of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things.⁴⁴⁸

Fenollosa's theories have been contested precisely on this point, that the Chinese language does not represent things: 'the Chinese notation was based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature in very ancient times, but it has gone through several stages of evolution since then.'⁴⁴⁹ However, in a strict sense this fact is irrelevant to the poetics that *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* has influenced since Pound published it in the mid 1930s.⁴⁵⁰ The poetics that stemmed from the idea that the absence of copulatives in Chinese writing allows a more organic relationship between the elements of a given text has signified not only a direct blow to the structuring logic of Western syntax but has also opened a greater freedom for the imagination to become the organisational element in poetry:

Para o estudioso norte-americano, a imaginação distingue-se por seu "poder de construção"; sua ação sobre o real não é de índole

⁴⁴⁷ A. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 44-45 (p. 44).

⁴⁴⁸ Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character*, p. 10.

⁴⁴⁹ Chang Yao-Xin, 'Pound's Chinese Translations', *Paideuma*, 17 (1988), 113-132 (p. 123).

⁴⁵⁰ Fenollosa himself clearly specifies that it is not Chinese language but Chinese poetry that his essay is concerned with: 'my subject is poetry, not language, yet the roots of poetry are in language', p. 7.

"imitative", mas "criativa" (seletiva). A "imagem" é o resultado desse "rápido poder" que, "num instante, parece capaz de explorar milhões de combinações possíveis, para seleccionar apenas aquela adequada".⁴⁵¹

This power of construction was the subject of the essay 'Language, Mind and Reality' by Benjamin Lee Whorf in which he writes about 'patterned relations'.⁴⁵² In this essay Whorf explains the different levels of actions involved in human speech that combine to create meaning, and that the pattern is always more important than any of the individual levels or words: 'words and speech are not the same thing. [...] The patterns of a sentence structure that guide words are more important than the words.'⁴⁵³ This is similar to what we saw in the work of Gironde although at a different scale, that of a whole book of poetry. But mechanism for the suggestion of sense and meaning could be read as parallel. In the case of concrete poetry, this can be transposed in regards to the form of the poem since it is not the words used that creates a concrete poem but the relationships suggested between elements of the poem.⁴⁵⁴ Because in the concrete poem words are not only signifiers pointing to an external abstract signified: 'we do not usually see words [...] we *read* them, which is to say we look through them at their significance, their contents. Concrete poetry is first of all a revolt against this transparency of the word.'⁴⁵⁵ So what the concrete poet is combining is not only the concepts behind the words but the physical words themselves. The emphasis in juxtaposition, as Laszlo Géfin explains, is the central method of modern poetry:

⁴⁵¹ H. de Campos, 'Ideograma, anagrama, diagrama', pp. 66-67.

⁴⁵² Benjamin Lee Whorf, 'Language, Mind and Reality', in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. and intro. by John Carroll (New York: Massachusetts Institute of Technology/John Wiley, 1956; repr. 1962), pp. 246-270.

⁴⁵³ Lee Whorf, 'Language, Mind and Reality', pp. 253.

⁴⁵⁴ This can be said of most poetry, Whorf does not have concrete poetry in mind but is writing about language in general. However, it is the relationships based on the space of the page that make the difference.

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Marjorie Perloff, "'Concrete Prose': Haroldo de Campos *Galáxias* and After', in *ubuweb* <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/perloff.html>> [accessed 1 August 2007]

The method constitutes the tip of a whole congeries of concerns related to the problem of representation in art. It opened up for Pound and others the possibility of organizing the poetic utterance in such a way that it would present an accurate model of the processes of modern reality.⁴⁵⁶

However, this method not only presents 'an accurate model of the processes of modern reality' but of reality per se. Fenollosa himself wrote that:

The form of the Chinese transitive sentence, and of the English (omitting particles), exactly corresponds to this universal form of action in nature. *This brings language close to things*, and in its strong reliance upon verbs it erects all speech into a kind of dramatic poetry.⁴⁵⁷

The creative imagination as the capability to combine and present different elements in an image of a process would thus be closer to the processes of nature. Conscious of this, concrete poetry positioned itself in front of things, open, in a position that they consider as of total realism.⁴⁵⁸ This consideration comes from the fact that the poems themselves are dealing with objects and emotions via words-as-objects. This is very close to what Pound also considered realism.⁴⁵⁹ It is also what we can read as the definition of objective writing that Barthes makes of the novels of Alain Robe-Grillet, the head of the Nouveau Roman movement in France: objective writing is close to the object by

⁴⁵⁶ Laszlo Géfin, *Ideogram: Modern American Poetry* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), pp. xii-xiii.

⁴⁵⁷ Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character*, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁸ Augusto de Campos, 'poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 44-45 (p. 44).

⁴⁵⁹ Ezra Pound, 'The Serious Artist', in *The Literary Essays*, pp. 41-57.

way of its presentation.⁴⁶⁰ In concrete poetry, then, the presentation effected is, in a first instance, of words themselves. The fact that words are considered objects does not diminish the poem's relationship with reality. The concrete poem does not propose an alternative reality by way of its use of words but it rather proposes an interaction between the world and the poem as an object. Of course these are different ideas about writing, different avenues of exploration. Yet underlining them is the need to bring language close(er) to objects and things, bring it closer to reality and the world. And this approximation can take place because the concrete poem is already an object in the world. For concrete poetry the poem has a full existential and phenomenological status as an object. For Haroldo de Campos concrete poetry is a verbivocovisual actualisation of the virtual object: 'poesia concreta: atualização "verbivocovisual" do objeto virtual'.⁴⁶¹ So the objectivity or realism of concrete poetry goes in both directions, it is the concrete poem as a reality on the page, but also due to its proximity to other things and objects in the world by their virtual actualisation in the poem; but also because as the concrete poem is an object, it becomes part of the world of objects, it is a created existence as much as a painting or a sculpture.

In this section I have analysed the consideration of words in a concrete poem as objects and how these, insofar as objects, transform the poem into an object in itself. This object belongs in the world and it proposes a reconsideration of the order of things. I think that this is the radical and revolutionary proposal of this project. In the next section I will concentrate on the form, the façade of the poem.

2.

In the last section I dealt with the idea of words-as-object and the way these affected the space of the poem. I will now turn my attention to the

⁴⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, 'Littérature objective', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), II, pp. 293-303.

⁴⁶¹ Haroldo de Campos, 'olho por olho a olho nu', in *TPC*, pp. 46-48 (p. 46).

space itself in order to further clarify the 'tense' relationship between the elements in a concrete poem. The problem of space has been connected to the other two poets of this study, in Girondo as the virtual space of the poem and in Eielson as the consciousness of a limitation. However, at this point the idea of space that I have in mind is limited to that of the page or the surface on which the poem is printed.⁴⁶² In modern Western poetry—since in Eastern poetry such as Japanese, or Middle Eastern poetry such as Persian, the use of space as part of the meaning of the poem is a well established tradition—it was Mallarmé who first drew attention to the space of the page in his seminal poem *Un coup de dés*:

A poesia concreta substitui o verso, como base formal do poema, pelo espaço. [...] O espaço a que nos referimos é o espaço de organização do poema. O campo gráfico, aquilo que Mallarmé chamava de 'branco' da página.⁴⁶³

In the organisation of space the page is transformed; it is no longer just a receptacle of discourse. It now holds the potential to organise the poem in an objective non-sequential way, as in Haroldo de Campos 'Poemandala' (fig. 25).⁴⁶⁴ The title is already a word-montage of poem and mandala. The mandala as a structuring form of a representation of the universe is generally circular with other geometrical forms inside the circle. The poem by Haroldo de Campos invites a vertical reading but also the possibilities of different combinations between the word-clusters that surround the symbol at centre. Although there is still a

⁴⁶² Another example of this is the poem 'Blanco' by Octavio Paz. The original version of this poem was printed on a single sheet of paper that was supposed to be unrolled like a scroll which would be revealing the content of one same poem. The first edition was published in 1967. In subsequent editions Paz added a note where he clarifies the poem should be read like a succession of symbols on a single page that as the reading advances the page unrolls a space that in its movement itself would also unroll a space that would reveal the text but that would also create it, Octavio Paz, 'Blanco', in *Obra poética I* of *Obras completas*, 14 vols (Barcelona: Círculo de lectores; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), XI, [pp. 422-450]; Haroldo de Campos, *Transblanco (em torno a Blanco de Octavio Paz)*, ed. and intro. by Emir Rodríguez Monegal (Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1986), p. 27.

⁴⁶³ H. de Campos, 'Aspectos do poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 96-108 (p. 100).

⁴⁶⁴ H. de Campos, 'Poemandala', in *Xadrez de Estrelas: percurso textual 1949-1974* (Sao Paulo: Perspectiva, 1976), unnumbered.

consecutive reading in this poem, its spatial arrangement suggests otherwise. The presence of the mandala at the centre of the poem has a similar structure as the musical composition *Sur Incises* by Pierre Boulez.⁴⁶⁵ In this piece the audience is sitting in the centre of the stage and it is surrounded by three ensembles of piano, harp and percussions. There is, to my experience, no dialogue connecting the three ensembles other than their simultaneous presence. The criss-crossing of sounds creates the space and tension of that particular piece. In Haroldo de Campos poem, the mandala and the spatial disposition of word-clusters invites the reader to experiment with different arrangements between the clusters thus providing the possibility of multiple readings. This arrangement is made possible by the conscious use of space that presents the vertical reading of the poem but also allows the possibilities of other combinations, as Décio Pignatari writes:

A poesia concreta, indo além da aplicação do processo tal como foi praticado por Pound, introduz no ideograma o espaço como elemento substantivo da estrutura poética: desse modo, cria-se uma nova realidade rítmica, espaço-temporal. O ritmo tradicional, linear, é destruído.⁴⁶⁶

The rhythm of the poem is no longer dictated by syllabic feet. Yet unlike Pound who wrote on his notes about Imagism that the poem should not follow the metronomic rhythm of feet but the breath of the phrase, the rhythm in concrete poetry is structured based on the spatial localization of words on the page and its simultaneous perception.⁴⁶⁷ A good example of this is the poem 'tensão' by Augusto de Campos (VV, 95, fig. 26). The poem is organised around the centre of the page, where we find the two 'symmetric' halves of the word 'tensão' one on top of the

⁴⁶⁵ Pierre Boulez. *Sur Incises/Messagesquise/Anthems 2*. CD Deutsche Grammophon (2000).

⁴⁶⁶ D. Pignatari, 'Poesia concreta: pequena marcação histórico-formal', in *TPC*, pp. 62-69 (p. 62)

⁴⁶⁷ Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', in *The Literary Essays*, pp. 3-14 (p. 3).

other. The rest of the words of the poem are also arranged in small columns of six letters, three on top of three. Some of these are words themselves like 'com', 'som', or 'sem'. In other cases the lower and upper levels of the column form a word, like 'con-tem' or 'can-tem'. The word 'tensão' at the centre functions as a pivot. This word is uniting the other elements to its left and right. Visually they form triangles or arrows that point in opposite directions. The eye of the reader returns to this central element as that which is holding together the forces pulling in opposite directions suggested by the arrows. This reading is reminiscent of Eielson's *quipus*, where the knot attracted to itself the energy of the composition. If the reader will remember, the knot in Eielson's work served as a vector to which and from which flowed all the structuring energy of a particular piece. This flow was emphasised by the folds and bends of the fabric. In Augusto de Campos's poem, the word 'tensão' at the centre performs a similar role. The word 'tensão' creates an acoustic, visual, and conceptual pivot. The concept of tension is recreated by the use of space since the columns of three letters impedes a fast reading; it is almost demanding a slow tempo emphasised by the wide empty spaces between the words. The reading is so directed due to the fact that semantically the eye has to follow the word down rather than to the right as it would be accustomed to do. The eye has to stop if it wants to continue reading semantically. If the eye were to read horizontally rather than vertically then the reader faces a series of sounds without semantic content. In one of the two recordings of readings of this poem the readers follow a vertical reading although they do not, overall, follow one direction but move about the text freely.⁴⁶⁸ That reading is structured with repetitions. The poem is not read only once; the word 'tensão' is repeated ten times to three and two repetitions of the other words of the poem. The readers take the poem as a score and they create combinations around the central word, as if they were following invisible

⁴⁶⁸ Augusto de Campos. 'tensao'. Music direction Cid Campos. Cosac & Naify. 2002.

lines that took them over the centre of the poem. This reading is recreating the visual structure of the poem taking the central word as a pivot, 'tensão' as the centre of gravity of the poem. The repetitive reading recreates the semantic charge of the word 'tensão' in such a way as to equate the visual and semantic levels of the poem.

The concrete poets partly based their poetic organisation on the tangible elements of print:

Trata-se, frisamos, de uma utilização funcional dos recursos tipográficos, imponentes, no seu arranjo tradicional, para expresser a nova organização do poema. A própria pontuação se torna aqui desnecessária, uma vez que é o espaço gráfico a pontuação essencial, o elemento "negativo".⁴⁶⁹

Space as an active element in the poem creates the order and the interval between words, yet it leaves to the reader himself the final task of interpretation. This is why space in the concrete poetry context is not viewed as a concept like it was in Gironde's *En la masmédula*, but as a component integral to the poem's form. When Gironde used this device he did it in a very successful manner; what the concrete poets would call isomorphic since what the poem is talking about is recreated by the form of the text on the page. In the poem 'Plexilio' the graphic/spatial disposition of the text 'corresponds' to the theme of dispersion of the poem. Space, the blank page, is as much a reality as the printed matter. This space as an active element in the poem is present in 'Poemandala' not only in the way the poem is structured but also in the way the space seems to suggest a vertical, scroll-like reading. The empty spaces seem to suggest a form to be followed, like in some Japanese calligraphic poetry:

⁴⁶⁹ Augusto de Campos, 'Poesia, Estrutura', in Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, *Mallarmé*, 3rd edn (Sao Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002), pp. 177-180 (p. 179).

When learning traditional calligraphy with brush and ink, the Japanese learn not only to write the character but also to incorporate the empty background as an additional carrier of meaning in the text [...] in the case of ink calligraphy, one can say that the background emptiness is imbued with additional meaning. There are even so-called 'empty brushstrokes'.⁴⁷⁰

From the open possibilities of interpretation of the white spaces, the 'functional' silence in concrete poetry defies the idea of syntactic organisation. If it is true that a punctuation mark cannot be easily ignored, the white or blank space does not have to be translated immediately into a pause since that space acts primarily on the visual form of the poem. It is in that immediacy that the space makes itself present.

Neus Galí writes that the problem regarding space in linguistic communication is connected with memory.⁴⁷¹ In oral traditions memory was held as sacred.⁴⁷² It was considered not a talent but a gift from the gods, because it united the present of man with times immemorial.⁴⁷³ Versification and rhythm were resources to aid the bard recall the collective knowledge of his culture.⁴⁷⁴ In this context, oral poetry and memory are related to time, both, because it elapses through time and because it fades immediately after it is uttered and therefore it was memory that functioned as a container to preserve that information. The character of poetry is unavoidably transformed when writing and printing come into play; memory loses its primary role since it was replaced by

⁴⁷⁰ Shuntaro Mukai, 'Characters that Represent', in *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture*, ed. by Yoshihiko Ikegami (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1991), p. 63.

⁴⁷¹ Neus Galí, *Poesía silenciosa, pintura que habla. De Simónides a Platón: la invención del territorio poético* (Barcelona: El acantilado, 1999), pp. 34-38; a similar idea is expressed by Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Ark, 1984), pp. 253-254.

⁴⁷² Galí, *Poesía silenciosa, pintura que habla*, p. 35.

⁴⁷³ Galí, *Poesía silenciosa, pintura que habla*, p. 35.

⁴⁷⁴ Galí, *Poesía silenciosa, pintura que habla*, p. 34; Paul Ricoeur explores the phenomenology of memory and the issues relating memory as a link with the personal and particularly the collective past in *La memoria, la historia, el olvido*, trans. by Agustín Neira (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), pp. 17-66.

writing as the preservation of culture and in its place it is the space of the parchment or folios of a book with the image of the written word that becomes the place of memory and knowledge. Riccardo Campa confirms that with the passage from an oral to a printed culture there were undeniable epistemological and mnemonic consequences; for example, in the switch from an emphasis on acoustics to sight, this second one being more spatial than temporal.⁴⁷⁵ With writing a different concept of work is established too, as Galí explains: 'sólo a partir y por causa de la escritura puede hablarse con propiedad de "tratamiento" o de "material"'.⁴⁷⁶ It is this idea of the materiality of written language that will become essential to concrete poetry, which tries to fuse the different aspects of language because with the advent of writing 'la palabra se percibe separada del flujo del discurso y se convierte en imagen'.⁴⁷⁷ The concrete poets were aware of this schism, as Décio Pignatari testifies:

O poeta fez do papel o seu público, moldando-o à semelhança de seu canto, e lançando mão de todos os recursos gráficos e tipográficos, desde a pontuação até o caligrama, para tenter a transposição do poema oral para o escrito, em todos os seus matizes.⁴⁷⁸

This is clearly portrayed by the series of poems 'poetamenos' (figs. 27 & 28) of Augusto de Campos which is based on Anton von Webern's principle of composition known as the 'klangfarbenmelodie'. The 'klangfarbenmelodie' stands for tone-colour-melody and it is a principle of composition that breaks up the melody dividing it between several instruments. In these poems Augusto de Campos seeks a correspondence with Webern's principle based on words:

⁴⁷⁵ Riccardo Campa, *La scrittura e la memoria* ([Roma]: Istituto della enciclopedia Italiana, [1987]), p. 17.

⁴⁷⁶ Galí, *Poesía silenciosa, pintura que habla*, p. 32.

⁴⁷⁷ Galí, *Poesía silenciosa, pintura que habla*, p. 170.

⁴⁷⁸ D. Pignatari, 'Sobre poesia oral e poesia escrita', *TPC*, pp. 11-13 (p. 11).

Uma melodia continua deslocada de um instrumento para outro, mudando constantemente sua cor:

instrumentos: frase/palavra/sílaba/letra(s), cujos timbres se definam p/ um tema gráfico-fonético ou "ideogrâmico".⁴⁷⁹

In these poems the reader faces their visual multi-coloured aspect that holds an approximate correspondence with sound that corroborates Pignatari's idea that the page had indeed become the public. If the public was the receptor of the music, dance, and poetry of the troubadours, then this principle can be transposed—sound and image—within the obvious limitations, to paper. It is this that holds the different media: colour, disposition of text and use of space, sound, images and meaning all in the space of a page. As Claus Clüver concludes about these poems 'the reading becomes multidirectional'.⁴⁸⁰ In concrete poetry there is the expressed intention to unite those different aspects of language:

Funções-relações gráfico-fonéticas ("fatores de proximidade e semelhança") e o uso substantivo do espaço como elemento de composição entretêm uma dialética simultânea de olho e fôlego, que, aliada à síntese ideogrâmica do significado, cria uma totalidade sensível "verbivocovisual", de modo a justapor palavras e experiência num estreito colamento fenomenológico.⁴⁸¹

As I have previously indicated, the concrete poets recognised Mallarmé as the first modern poet to consider the blank space of the page as an integral part of the poem: 'l'armature intellectuelle du poème se dissimule et tient—a lieu—dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier: significatif silence qu'il n'est pas moins beau de

⁴⁷⁹ A. de Campos, 'poetamemos', *VV*, p. 65.

⁴⁸⁰ Claus Clüver, 'Klangfarbenmelodie' in *Polychromatic Poems: A. von Webern and A. de Campos*, in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 18, (1981) 386-398 (p. 387).

⁴⁸¹ A. de Campos, 'poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 44-45 (p. 45).

composer, que le vers.⁴⁸² As Mallarmé indicates, the space of the page is not only a 'negative' space that appears in contrast to the printed matter, as Augusto de Campos argued. Rather, the space of the page is an element that needs as much work as words. In this sense the comparison between the white page and silence can be misleading since silence in a musical work appears by contrast to sound while the white of the page is already a 'framed space'. That is, a blank page is already formed by the shape and size of the paper, while silence without a frame is not part of the work. As an example of the latter we may recall John Cage's composition *4' 33"*, where the musician takes the stage, starts a timer, opens the keyboard lid of a piano, closes it, and sits there silently waiting for four minutes and thirty three seconds.⁴⁸³ The idea is that by the performer's actions the silence of the concert hall is framed.⁴⁸⁴ Thus the public will begin to notice the noises of the everyday that 'inhabit' that silence and that we do not hear anymore. Gomringer's 'silencio' invites a comparison between the printed/acoustic which create a frame for the white space, which in itself is closer to silence than the signifier. Gomringer named his own concrete poems constellations after Mallarmé.⁴⁸⁵ In his manifesto 'From Line to Constellation' Gomringer, in denouncing the new modes of modern poetic communication, speaks of a field or play-area on which the poet arranges the words as if he were 'drawing stars together to form a cluster.'⁴⁸⁶ The immediate visual idea about composition that Gomringer is using is similar to the Noigandres in the sense that the poem is structured according to spatial relations. Gomringer does not address the space of the page directly as a concept, nevertheless this issue was very much present in his own compositions as we can clearly see from his poem 'silencio':

⁴⁸² Mallarmé, 'Sur Poe', in *Œuvres complètes*, p. 872.

⁴⁸³ John Cage. *4' 33"*. CD Hungaroton.

⁴⁸⁴ Cage in his 'Lecture on Nothing' explained: 'there are silences and the words make, help make the silences', in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 109-127 (p. 109).

⁴⁸⁵ Eugen Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellation', in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. by Mary Ellen Solt (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 67.

⁴⁸⁶ Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellation', p. 67.

silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio⁴⁸⁷

The blank space in the centre becomes 'charged' by the surrounding words. And, at the same time, the words are charged in their turn as they are 'pushed' away from the centre of the page like a graphic big-bang. The graphic 'literal' silence is possible because of the use and disposition of typography and the space of the page; that is, as much as the words invest the blank space with meaning because of their contiguity, the blank space invest the words in its turn. The empty centre square calls our attention to the space surrounding all the words of the poem and it makes us wonder about it. While in a poem in verse, alien to this spatial experimentation, the page is a medium for the printed words to symbolise linguistic sound particles, in this poem the blank space of the page becomes as active as the printed words themselves. For a verse poem the use of the word 'silencio' according to Eduardo Chirinos has the following implications:

El silencio *debe ser* la palabra "silencio". Esta lectura encierra una sutil paradoja que revela, una vez más, la imposibilidad de situarse fuera del lenguaje; "la palabra silencio" como frase es un oxymoron, pero "silencio" como palabra es un signo, es decir, una presencia como cualquier otra en el sintagma.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁷ Gomringer, 'silencio', in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, p. 91.

⁴⁸⁸ Eduardo Chirinos, *La morada del silencio: una reflexión sobre el silencio en la poesía* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), p. 75.

However, Gomringer's poem is proof of the possibility of going outside language. In fact, I think, there lies the power of this simple poem. The central space of the poem points not to a signified but rather to the absence of one, which emphasises the absence of the word that in its turn points to the absence of sound. This poem is also playing with the way in which we understand silence; the word that designates it is repeated fourteen times. Yet I think that this poem is more than an ironic commentary on modern visual or urban culture, since it reflects the nature of language as a medium to approach, communicate and understand reality. As this poem testifies, it is language itself that gets in the way of actually experiencing that which language is intending to express. The poem reflects on language and on written language in particular: the poem speaks about silence but not only because it is saying so repeatedly. This poem is showing by extra-linguistic means what the words indicate but fail to enact. The absence of writing at the centre of the page is showing the reader, in a more direct way than the words themselves, that which the printed words are conceptualising and trying to communicate: silence. However, the blank space is charged with meaning because it is surrounded, it is framed, by the repetition of the word silence, that is to say that a blank piece of paper would not necessarily suggest to the reader the complex play between language, writing and silence the way it is achieved by this poem. What it is important to address at the moment is the use of space as an essential part of the poem and not only as a supporting platform.

In Johanna Drucker's contribution to the volume *Experimental—Visual—Concrete* published in the mid-1990s, she writes that 'in the work of Gomringer, it is the structural relation of the words, rather than any particular image suggested by them, which gives their visual presentation value.'⁴⁸⁹ Due to the classificatory nature of her essay she is attempting a

⁴⁸⁹ Johanna Drucker, 'Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry: Context and Concepts', in *Experimental—Visual—Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry since the 1960s*, ed. by K. David Jackson, Eric Vos & Johanna Drucker, *Avant-Garde Critical Studies*, 10 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 39-61 (p. 40).

clear demarcation between the different types of poetry she is engaged in describing. It seems that for Drucker the spatial element, although important, tends to be homogenised in all the different practices. She writes 'whether contemplating a vase-shaped ode or staring at the space in the center of Eugen Gomringer's famous poem 'Silencio', one is aware that visual presentation is key to the meaning of the work'.⁴⁹⁰ At first this seems like a fair assessment, but reading it more carefully we easily localise a lack of nuance in her argument since she is equating pattern and concrete poetry with the general use of the visual form of the poem. She seems not to have taken into account the poets' thesis for the reorganisation of language not based upon syntax and discourse but upon the space of the composition. The blank space in the centre of Gomringer's poem cannot be replaced by any type of punctuation or any other organisation of the words on the page because it would simply be a different poem, while a pattern poem of, say, a vase can have a different shape since this is only an echo of the sense but not the poem itself.

In a concrete poem the space of the page does not function in relation to the syntactical disposition of discourse, if by discourse we understand the formation of sentences to convey complex ideas. Georges Perec, the French writer related to the neo-avant-garde group OuLiPo, proposes that it is writing that gives order to the 'almost nothingness' of the blank page; that it is writing that orders it in a kind of architectural fashion; writing, concludes Perec, 'gives it a direction, it vectorizes it'.⁴⁹¹ Although Perec did not have concrete poetry in mind when he wrote this, I think that this could also be said of a concrete poem since this is the consciousness about space that lies behind the poems. The placing of a single word on a blank page re-signifies both. This is what happens too in Eielson's series 'papel' which is formed by individual sheets of paper sometimes with typed words and phrases, sometimes punctured,

⁴⁹⁰ Drucker, 'Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry', p. 40.

⁴⁹¹ Georges Perec, 'Species of Spaces', in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed. and trans. by John Sturrock, rev. edn. (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 2-92 (p. 9). The name OuLiPo stands for *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, the group was founded in Paris in 1960.

sometimes stained. For William Rowe this work establishes an order where

Words appear against a background (paper, language, space?) and disappear when they become simultaneously accessible and inaccessible. The text produces a mysterious sense of inconstancy: the viewer cannot tell whether he is on the inside or outside of it. It does not allow any knowledge, other than its actual happening.⁴⁹²

A concrete poem where the words are located at the bottom of the page or at the upper right corner is not the same poem even though it may use the same text. The use and understanding of the space of the work was also transformed in other areas of artistic expression. With the collage avant-garde artists were able to present an immediate connexion between discontinuous elements, among which there were the newspapers which provided them with ready-made elements of the world, among them words. The technique of collage allowed artists to circumvent the limitations of linear discourse while maintaining a context: 'a partir de efectos diferenciales y efectos de conmutación, combina, en agrupamientos de integración parcial, componentes heterogéneos que, al no perder su alteridad, siguen remitiendo al contexto de origen.'⁴⁹³ This circumvention was also attempted in poetry; for example, Apollinaire's 'Lundi rue Christine', is a poem based on snippets of different conversations overheard in the street.⁴⁹⁴ As with the visual collage, what this poem presents is the association of seemingly unconnected fragments of speech bringing them together in the almost 'simultaneous' space of the poem; 'almost simultaneous' because the reading of this

⁴⁹² Rowe, 'The Boundaries of the Poem', pp. 199-200.

⁴⁹³ Saúl Yurkievich, 'Estética de lo discontinuo y lo fragmentario: el collage', in *Del arte verbal* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2002), pp. 79-94 (p. 79).

⁴⁹⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Lundi rue Christine', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Décaudin, 7 vols (Paris: Balland et Lecat, 1966), III, pp. 172-173.

poem still occurs through time. However, the principle of collage is already and validly at play there since the integral image of the poem is of the simultaneity of the conversations from which the snippets of speech are taken and which are taking place within the same period of time. This effect of simultaneity was a key that the concrete poets saw in the work of Joyce, particularly in *Finnegans Wake*, but also in Eisenstein's theory of montage which the filmmaker himself liked to the ideogram.⁴⁹⁵

Louis Aragon in his book of essays *Les collages* writes that 'pour les cubistes, le timbre-poste, le journal, la boîte d'allumettes, que le peintre collait sur son tableau, avaient la valeur d'un teste, de un instrument de contrôle de la réalité même du tableau.'⁴⁹⁶ What happens in the collage is, as Aragon explains, that the space of the painting acquires its own reality where the different elements brought into it are arranged independently of the external reality to which the composition is still connected but not necessarily trying to portray or represent mimetically. The collage creates its own reality from the reality of the outside world. The way a concrete poem is displayed on the page can be considered similar to the technique of collage since the elements (letters, syllables, words) are adjusted according to a relationship within the space available but at the same time are thought of as autonomous elements: 'na poesia concreta, sintaxe visual: fatores de proximidade e semelhança, relacionando palavras no espaço, tendo em vista a simultaneidade.'⁴⁹⁷ That is how we perceive a concrete poem, as an image and as such without the usual reading order. As in a collage the elements of the poem are thought of in a simultaneous relationship with each other and their relationship within the space of the page. This simultaneity is not solely concentric because the semantic aspect of the concrete poem is never forgotten. The mental connection effected by language between thought

⁴⁹⁵ H. de Campos, 'Aspectos da poesia concreta', in *TPC*, pp. 96-108 (p. 98).

⁴⁹⁶ Louis Aragon, *Les collages* (Paris: Hermann, 1980), p. 29.

⁴⁹⁷ D. Pignatari, 'Poesia concreta: organização', in *TPC*, pp. 86-90 (p. 88).

and reality is still there as one more of the facets of the poem yet not as the organising one.

However, the term collage may prove to be somewhat misleading since it incorporates other visual material besides language which is not usual in the concrete poetry of the Sao Paulo poets.⁴⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Augusto de Campos in his *Popcretos* (figs. 19, 29 & 30) used visual and linguistic ready-made objects and fragments of objects as the primary material. What makes these works different from other collages is that the organisation is based on a semantic, rather than visual, reading of the images involved, whether these are images of body parts or printed words, for example in the poems 'psiui!' and 'olho por olho'.⁴⁹⁹ In this way, the images acquire a balance between the images as such and the images as concepts. But just as in collage the form of a concrete poem is based on the disposition of its elements within the space of the page, creating thus what Aragon called 'la réalité même du tableau.' Most commonly the concrete poem will not use ready-made objects but will rely on typographic and graphic design to create the 'reality of the poem'. This is what makes a concrete poem exist in the boundaries of design and literature since it participates of both transforming the existence of the poem from a purely linguistic work to a 'verbivocovisual' one; that is, a text that uses the semantic, acoustic and visual levels of language. The use of space and cut-outs in the 'popcretos' places the stress of composition on the disposition of the different elements on the page. It also emphasises the material relationship between the page and the cut-outs. While in Eielson's 'papel' the words and the text blended into an enigmatic entity, in the 'popcretos' the materiality and the 'construction' displace any possibility of mystery placing the meaning of the text in the very use of those materials and on what the juxtaposition of those materials signifies: the present reality of the poem.

⁴⁹⁸ This could also invite a misreading relating concrete poetry to some Surrealism, Expressionism or Dada. My intention here is to expand on the concept of space as an organisational principle.

⁴⁹⁹ *VV*, pp. 123-133.

Taking a poem like Haroldo de Campos's 'âmago do ômega' in which the text seems to be floating in the upper right corner, the reader instinctively realises that the page is much more than an inert platform upon which the text is set (XE, one, fig. 31). In this poem the text suggests a constellation of stars, which is visually supported by the disposition of the white letters on the black page. The suggestion of the night sky, although unavoidable, does not happen to the same extent in the other poems of the collection as 'No amago do Ômega' (XE, four, fig. 32) or 'Silencio' (XE, two, fig. 33) where the white texts occupy most of the black pages. The constellation effect of 'âmago do ômega' is not only due to the use of black paper and white ink but to the intentional disposition of the text. To insert the text on the upper right corner creates a feeling that the text is floating in space, it becomes distant as if unreachable; a feeling that is emphasised by a pause or silence created by the black surrounding the text. As we first see the whole poem, our gaze is stirred to the corner where before 'reading' the text we see the pattern formed by the letters and words within the larger pattern of the whole page. Even before reading it, the poem is already yielding a particular meaning: a poetic cosmogony. Constellations are star patterns which have received a name. They are linked to myth, and in this sense exist beyond history, they refer to time immemorial. This poem is also connected to another constellation: *Un coup de dés*. In the poem some of the letters seem to be cut off, independent of the words or clusters. This isolation can be seen in particular in the two individual 'os' at the right side of the text. They are just lingering there, at the edge of the text, almost as if they had nothing to do with it but hinting at the beginning of its dispersion. The letter 'o' has particular importance. It is the actual form of 'omega' the Greek letter; it forms a perfect circle which indicates cycles; and is acoustically open, the effect being that of an echo. The repetition of the 'o', visually and acoustically, creates a sense of repetition and dispersion. It also creates a sense of direction that the

same disposition of the text on the page is making. The 'ô' of 'ômega' stands as the apex of an open triangle formed by the lines of 'os' and the word 'ô meg a'. If we take the direction the pattern is pointing seems to be downwards, almost like an arrow pointing down. This ambiguity is repeated in the text itself, the beginning and the end. The text points downward but seems to me moving upwards, a graphic effect of the expansion of the universe. This poem by Haroldo de Campos is a strong example of the creative and meaningful use of space in concrete poetry.

It is the creative and meaningful use of space combined with a particular consciousness about words-as-objects that forms the concrete poem into an object since the space of the page is 'organised' by the words and the words are organised as things because there is a consciousness about the space they will occupy. They both act and react on each other. This graphic form is what the reader faces as an object. This connection with the reader is what I will go on to discuss in the next section of this chapter.

3.

So far I have discussed issues concerning the form of the concrete poem. I will now move to the opposite side, that of the reader's perception of the concrete poem and the poets' intentions toward their readers. These are some of the questions that I will pursue in order to close the communicative circle between the poem and the reader, and analyse the poets' intentions towards their audience. Décio Pignatari had specified that for the concrete poem the paper had taken the role of the listener of oral poetry. But there must still be a reader that interacts with the concrete poem. The concrete poem as such *demand*s the interaction of the reader. The reader must be active, and he must interpret. I think that here lies the ethical charge of the concrete poem. A concrete poem destroys any literal approach in its demand for an interpretation. It is this interpretation that makes of concrete poetry an extremely interactive

activity. This interaction with the reader, not so as the reader can project his or her expectations on to the text, but in a performative quality, makes concrete poetry a reader's activity. The examples are plenty but the series of 'poetamenos' are a good example. The name itself points to a withdrawal of the poet and a coming forth of the text to face the reader/performer.

Haroldo de Campos, years before Umberto Eco published his *Opera aperta*, wrote 'A obra de arte aberta' where he opposes to the works of linear development with their beginning-middle-end structure the idea of an 'organização circular da matéria poética' that would connect with a notion of a 'espaço-tempo ou contenção do todo na parte'.⁵⁰⁰ This circularity and elemental synecdoche rely on the creative capacity of the reader who is the one that will be facing these poems. In Eco's own version he writes that:

A work of art, therefore, is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself. [...] it is obvious that works like those of Berio or Stockhausen are 'open' in a more tangible sense.⁵⁰¹

It is the open possibilities for performing/interpreting concrete poems that makes them objects outside the subjectivity of the author. I think that concrete poems are exterior objects; their words can therefore

⁵⁰⁰ H. de Campos, 'A obra de arte aberta', *TPC*, pp. 30-33 (pp. 30-31).

⁵⁰¹ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni, intro. by David Robey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 4.

also be considered as exterior.⁵⁰² In fact, their exteriority is based on the exteriority of their language. Not only because the concrete poem is an object to which we relate to its exterior form but because the poet pulls away from its creation leaving it to face its reader with as little intervention on his part as possible. This is one of the reasons why the concrete poets wrote extensive theory and criticism, because they themselves approached the poetical phenomenon as readers rather than authors. Eduardo Milán writes that 'en la modernidad no hay "adentro" y si no hay adentro no hay "casa", es decir *palabra*. Todo ocurre afuera.'⁵⁰³ Milán is making reference to Martin Heidegger's enigmatic phrase speech 'is the house of Being.'⁵⁰⁴ Milán is using this to indicate a difference between the existence of being and modernity's processes of production which are based on industrial repetition. To say that in modernity there is no inside maybe too generalising, but it is indicating a general sentiment about the loss of meaning even in the very basis strata such as language and speech. Not having 'palabra' signifies the loss of the individual, the loss of the subject who communicated through speech. In modernity there is an objectification, that is, processes of production from which even the individual is not safe. In this sense, the individual is as much an object as those created by the machinery of industrial production. On the other hand, this phenomenon led to poetics such as those by Chilean poet Nicanor Parra, who has since the 1950s developed his anti-poetry 'where feelings and their intensification are not the exclusive property of an admired self (offered for identification); in this sense it is a poetry without a personal voice.'⁵⁰⁵ Speech in this respect is where the being of

⁵⁰² This can be understood in many ways, from the reality of the poem as an object to the complex functions of language linked to ontology, for an analysis of the latter the already mentioned essay by Jacques Derrida, 'La retirada de la metáfora', in *La deconstrucción en las fronteras de la filosofía*, pp. 35-75.

⁵⁰³ Eduardo Milán, *Trata de no ser constructor de ruinas*, Ensayo, 2 (Guadalajara, Mexico: Filodecaballos, 2003), p. 44.

⁵⁰⁴ 'Language is the precinct (templum), that is, the house of Being', Martin Heidegger, 'What are poets for?', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 91-142 (p. 132).

⁵⁰⁵ William Rowe, 'Nicanor Parra: The Poem as Amoeba', in *Poets of Contemporary Latin America*, pp. 29-77 (p. 31).

man becomes manifest in the world. The process of manifestation implies a previous un-manifested state: an interiority. What Milán is implying here was also present between the lines in Heidegger's idea, as George Steiner writes:

Tanto en Heidegger como en Celan está implícito un post—o quizá un pre—humanismo. Heidegger argumentaba que el hombre aún no ha empezado a saber cómo pensar, cómo comprender una sociedad de consumo en masa, inevitablemente tecnológica, al borde del nihilismo.⁵⁰⁶

Insofar as that interiority is related to pre-modern man, then some poets such as the concrete poets or Nicanor Parra see that in the modern Western reality of capitalist industrialisation that manifestation of a subject's interiority is no longer poetically viable because it does not reflect the reality of the times. The post-humanism of which Steiner writes is not the end of man but rather the transformation of what it was up to that point understood as humanity as a concept. The advent of the historical avant-garde movements pointed in this direction.⁵⁰⁷ If humanity is eroded by industrialism and mass production, how then is art going to remain the same. The Brazilian urban reality of the second half of the twentieth century was one pointing towards an entry into industrialisation and modernity.⁵⁰⁸ The construction of Brasilia was on its way. The concrete poets looked back at the avant-garde spirit of the modernists which for them represented more the opening of a new and possible reality rather than the closure of a historical development. In this context

⁵⁰⁶ George Steiner, 'Celan y Heidegger: diálogo en silencio', *Confabulario* (8 November 2004) in <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/graficos/confabulario/08-noviembre-04.htm>> [accessed 8 September 2007].

⁵⁰⁷ For Spanish sociologist Eduardo Subirats, the avant-garde movements represent the systematic dismemberment of subjectivity. He sees in the avant-garde project the annihilation of individuality and particularly individual rationality under the banner of homogeneity and industrial production, Eduardo Subirats, *La existencia sitiada* (Monterrey: Fineo, 2006), pp. 42-51.

⁵⁰⁸ Gonzalo Aguilar, *Poesía concreta brasileira: as vanguardas na encruzilhada modernista* (Sao Paulo: Universidade de Sao Paulo, 2005), pp. 247-268.

a post-humanism could also mean the entry of a new kind of individual that would surpass what had come before him and that would thus require a new kind of art, beyond individuality and subjective expressiveness. This is related to a modern creative mind that no longer seeks a poetic utopia but that which is part of his everyday existence. This shift also had to do with the ideas about a possible transformation of man's everyday reality, so poetry had to place itself inside that reality to start with.

In a letter dated 14 March 1968, Octavio Paz wrote from Delhi to Haroldo de Campos:

O discurso é o espaço —o contexto— do poema. Não nego com isso as possibilidades da poesia concreta: penso que são, a um tempo, imensas e limitadas. Presisamente por limitar-se a um aspecto da língua —o signo e não o discurso—, a poesia concreta descobriu um *imenso* território de associações, alusões e significações. Os senhores descobriram —ou inventaram— uma verdadeira topologia poética. À parte desta função de exploração e invenção, a poesia concreta é por si mesma uma crítica do pensamento discursivo e, assim uma crítica de nossa civilização. Esta crítica é exemplar.⁵⁰⁹

Topology is here a literal reference to the form of the poem, its external visual-acoustic aspect. To extract the poem from discourse is also an image of exteriority, a placing in the outside. Paz here plays with the idea of an implied interiority of discourse. Also, what Paz meant by topology can to be seen through the lens of his comment about the criticism of discursive thought. In the already quoted *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer explain that enlightened thought has always tried to clarify even the darkest corners of existence, calling myth its enemy. Mystery was expunged from language; Orpheus was no

⁵⁰⁹ In Haroldo de Campos, *Transblanco*, p. 98.

longer considered the mythical origin of poetry and song. For enlightened thought according to Adorno and Horkheimer the process of reasoning pulls away from the object, out into the world of concepts and neutral mathematical formulas. And it is in this neutral dimension of thought that language lost the possibilities it had possessed of organising or even altering reality because there it all falls down to a precognition of ordered patterns and pre-established structures or categories of thought that lost any real impact on its referent:

When examining its own guilty conscience, thought has to forgo not only the affirmative use of scientific and everyday conceptual language, but just as much that of the opposition. There is no longer any available form of linguistic expression which has not tended toward accommodation to dominant currents of thought; and what a devalued language does not do automatically is proficiently executed by societal mechanisms.⁵¹⁰

These 'dominant currents of thought' point to the base of this line of questioning by concrete poetry's criticism of Western civilisation underlined by Paz. The question goes to the heart of the modes and structures of thought and their relationship to language. And although the concrete poets embraced the project of modernity in Brazil, there was no naïveté in their perspective. That is, their acceptance of modernity was not uncritical, it was rather a way to try to understand the developing phenomenon from within its own mechanisms.

Through enlightened thought man was supposed to acquire a more true and objective view of reality, through enlightened thought man was supposed to be capable of transforming his environment for his own

⁵¹⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xii. Michael Foucault in *The Order of Things* sees a clear change in Western thought exemplified in certain branches of French thinking from the late Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century, the change occurs in the eighteenth century. The changes are manifested in the way man organised the world and the intellectual mechanisms he used to understand it, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1974; repr. 1997).

benefit: 'in the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty.'⁵¹¹ Man in this perspective is the centre of creation. The idea of post-humanism here becomes clearer since it is a direct criticism or a search for alternatives of this anthropo-centric view. It is not the apocalyptic destruction of man but the reconsideration of man's place in the world. The question in this context of the Enlightened thought, then, in regards to language that generally moves towards abstractions and empty formulas, is about the approximation to reality that that language can or cannot perform. If the reader will recall, this was one of the major points established by Fenollosa in his essay on Chinese poetry: it brings language and reality closer. In regards to concrete poetry the rationale would be that a language that is objectified belongs to the world of objects, and it is treated as such. Therefore the relations that are established with those referents are on the same plane, the poem recuperates weight and presence and recovers a sense of connection with them. For the enlightened thought nature is something to dominate and use, objects are created for the accumulation of knowledge and power. But it is from within this context of mechanisms of production that a poetic explosion occurs. What sets concrete poetry against the grain of the dominant currents of thought is related, firstly, to its practicality; secondly, to its interpretative openness, what to Gomringer would be the poem as a functional object, an object for spiritual use.⁵¹² Poetry is not practical, it is not a product in the sense of belonging to the market exchange of goods and services and it does not produce anything in its turn from a mercantilist point of view. Although for some critics like Gonzalez and Treece this is exactly what the concrete poets ended up doing:

⁵¹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 3.

⁵¹² Eugen Gomringer, 'The Poem as a Functional Object'.

For the Concretists, modernization was not problematic or ambiguous. On the contrary, the perspective which overshadowed this period was one of uncritical identification with national capitalist development. Its effect was to falsely polarize the debate about poetry between two mutually exclusive extremes: on the one hand, their own view of poetry as a 'pure', autonomous and self-referring practice, the construction of objective, utilitarian forms or aesthetic 'commodities', reproducing the mechanism of mass production and consumption characteristic of industrial capitalism; and on the other hand, what they saw as the historically 'obsolete' poetry of subjective expression.⁵¹³

It seems to me that this is a hasty assessment of what concrete poetry attempted and it is missing one of the very basic ideas of the concrete poetry project: to present man with new and efficient forms of communication:

O poema concreto, entre suas virtudes, possui desde logo a de efetuar uma comunicação rápida. Comunicação essa de formas, de estruturas, não de conteúdos verbais. Realmente, apoiado verbivoco-visualmente em elementos que se integram numa consonância estrutural, o poema concreto agride imediatamente, por todos os lados, o campo perceptivo do leitor que nele busque o que nele existe: um conteúdo-estrutura.⁵¹⁴

As we can see from this, the idea of the creation of a poetic object was not due to the fact of blindly mimicking the processes of mass production but due to the relationship between modernity and faster ways of existing in a modern urban setting. Again Gomringer can be a

⁵¹³ Mike Gonzalez and David Treece, *The Gathering of Voices*, p. 229.

⁵¹⁴ H. de Campos, 'Poesia concreta—linguagem—comunicação', in *TPC*, pp. 70-85 (p. 81).

neutral reference in terms of the intention of concrete poetry and communication:

The language of today must have certain things in common with poetry, and that they should sustain each other both in form and substance. In the course of daily life this relationship often passes unnoticed. Headlines, slogans, groups of sounds and letters give rise to forms which could be models for a new poetry just waiting to be taken up for meaningful use. The aim of the new poetry is to give poetry an organic function in society again, and in doing so to restate the position of poet in society. Bearing in mind, then, the simplification both of language and its written form, it is only possible to speak of an organic function for poetry in terms of the given linguistic situation.⁵¹⁵

The point is not to create a poetry that would deny the situation of the present, but that would speak from within that situation and would thus give it some sense and order. Concrete poetry with its principles of fast and effective communication breaks away from romantic ideals of what poetry is supposed to be. The generalisations applied by Gonzalez and Treece to the concrete poetry project are misleading; for example, the idea of equating concrete poetry with 'pure' poetry. Concrete poetry was interested, as was established in the first section of this chapter, with language as a socio-historical product and not as an solely abstract category as in the case of 'pure' poetry. Those two poetic categories are mutually exclusive. For the enlightened thought, of which 'pure' poetry is a product, language pulls away from things and it is exactly the opposite what concrete poetry looks for: the approximation to reality, to man. And on the other hand, 'abstraction, the tool of Enlightenment, treats its

⁵¹⁵ Eugen Gomringer, 'From Line to Constellation', ubuweb, <<http://www.ubu.com/papers/gomringer01.html>> [accessed 15 May 2007]

objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them.⁵¹⁶ Therefore the abstraction connected to modernity and the industrial revolution is contrary to the search for the object and the connection with other objects that is the basis of the concrete poetry project. This is why I do not agree with scholars such as Noé Jitrik who writes that:

O bien la vanguardia, en cuanto a su textualidad aspira a organizarse en torno a un propósito de autorreferencialidad, es un "en sí", inmanencia pura, mundo de signos cuyos significados excluyen ciertos referentes muy privilegiados, o bien, porque se propone modificar algo del exterior [...] deviene "política", assume la política.⁵¹⁷

Although Jitrik himself accepts that such divisions cannot be taken literally, he still employs them to begin his argumentation. But I think that what concrete poetry accomplished is beyond these divisions. Concrete poetry with its preoccupations about the presence of the poem in the world managed to be structured around a language based order but was also involved in the everyday life of the city.

Enlightenment's fear of the unknown was underlined by a pressure to explain the existence of man and the world in logical and scientific terms; such a frame of mind would, in the end, try to eradicate the very presence of the unknown in man's life, and this strikes at the very heart of poetry. But on the other hand, concrete poetry wanted to extract those elements of mystery and myth from their language in order to establish a clear and direct communication with their readers. They were looking to use the most direct language to achieve a direct and honest communication: 'a poesia concreta acaba com o símbolo, o mito. Com o mistério. O mais lúcido trabalho intelectual para a intuição mais clara.'⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 13.

⁵¹⁷ Noé Jitrik, 'Las dos tentaciones de la vanguardia', in *América Latina: Palavra, Literatura e Cultura*, pp. 57-74 (p. 60).

⁵¹⁸ D. Pignatari, 'Nova poesia: concreta', *TPC*, pp. 41-43 (p. 42).

Poetry relates to the unknown not as a solution to a problem, but as a fact of human experience; it relates to the unknown as that, the unknown not disclosed, not explained. There cannot be any domination this way. To dominate is one of the bases for the development of enlightened civilisation: 'the universality of ideas as developed by discursive logic, domination in the conceptual sphere, is raised upon the basis of actual domination.'⁵¹⁹ The game of domination by any means through rationality excludes poetry as the realm of romantic utopias. Any attempt by poets to create anything different, for example, the concrete poets trying to understand the processes of modernity, is shut down as a project alien to what poetry 'really' is.

The process of creation of meaning in concrete poetry is different from that of discursive logic or scientific thought, yet this does not mean that it is false or empty (poetry and art empty of any sort of objective meaning is still a view held today by most people).⁵²⁰ What concrete poetry presents of reality and language, not as an argument or a formula, is not in competition with science. A concrete poem insofar as gestalt (a system that it is more than the sum of its parts) will always keep its 'meaning' out of the reach of a discursive explanation; insofar as a gestalt, the possibilities of approximation are numerous, and the search for 'the' meaning of the poem becomes in its turn meaningless.⁵²¹ The dissection of a poem into categories would inevitably miss the existence of the poem as a unit.

The word, almost isolated, in concrete poetry, becomes then the monad of meaning. Sound, semantics, images on and off the page, are bared down to the solidity of the word. This is not only making reference to the creation of a poem with minimalist usage of elements, but to another aspect of the aforementioned reconsideration of language, in this

⁵¹⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 14.

⁵²⁰ '[poems...] they make you sit up and not think, which is perhaps the real point of poetry.' Colm Tóibín, 'The Comet's Trail', *The Guardian Review*, 29 May 2004, p. 37.

⁵²¹ The gestalt theories are important for the Noigandres group in relation to isomorphism of the poem with the world, H. de Campos, 'Poesia Concreta-Linguagem-Comunicação', in *TPC*, pp. 70-85.

case the basis thereof: the word. And the word as this monad of meaning is charged now with an evident ethical charge, because this objectification is supposed to have some bearing on the world. 'Imposible escribir/ poesía/ sobre un cardenal/ sin mancharse las manos/ de cardenal', reads a poem by Eduardo Milán, who was himself greatly influenced by concrete poetry.⁵²² The movement of approximation that poetic language should perform comprises an ethical involvement of the poet with his language and the reality it names. Décio Pignatari talks about something similar when he writes:

com a revolução industrial, a palavra começou a descolar-se do objeto a que se referia, alienou-se, tornou-se objeto qualitativamente diferente, quis ser a palavra §flor§ sem a flor. [...] a poesia concreta realiza a síntese crítica, isomórfica: §jarro§ é a palavra jarro e também jarro mesmo enquanto conteúdo, isto é, enquanto objeto designado. a palavra jarro é a coisa da coisa, o jarro do jarro, como §la mer dans la mer§. isomorfismo.⁵²³

That is concrete poetry wants to reconstruct that link between language and the world. The ethical charge that Milán explores in his poem is implicit here. With the existence of words as objects, poetry is able to move from a linear development in the poem to a spatial-temporal organisation which is also ethical because it is breaking away from preconceived notions of order and reality.⁵²⁴ This practice questions

⁵²² Eduardo Milán, 'Esto es', in *Manto* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), p. 33.

⁵²³ Décio Pignatari, 'nova poesia: concreta', in *Teoria da Poesia Concreta*, pp. 41-43 (p. 42). For the presence of the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment in Latin America see Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1992), pp. 162-164; Ronald D. Hussey, 'Traces of French Enlightenment in Colonial Hispanic America, in *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Arthur P. Whitaker, intro. by Federico de Onís (New York: D. Appleton-Centruy, 1942), pp. 23-51; John Tate Lanning, 'The Reception of the Enlightenment in Latin America', in *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, pp. 71-93; Alexander Marchant, 'Aspects of the Enlightenment in Brazil', in *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, pp. 95-118.

⁵²⁴ For example, in painting, we can think about the 'falseness' of one point perspective in relation to the actual way in which we see reality, which is not linear but rather it follows the curvature of the eye, Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as symbolic form*, trans. by Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 27-36.

our notions of reality, it opens our thought to the possibilities of transforming the way we think and understand reality: 'é preciso que nossa inteligência se habitue a compreender intético-ideograficamente em lugar de analítico-discursivamente.'⁵²⁵ This is not the proposition of a utopian alternative but an alternative to our ways of perceiving and thinking about the world. It is thus that a change, if any, is conceivable.

This possibility for a new organisation of the poem carries *a fortiori* an ethical charge: the presentation of new forms of language organisation. This touches upon an interesting yet sometimes neglected aspect of Poundean poetics: language and ethics. Pound's politics aside, the issue here is the use of the precise language to present a specific feeling or emotion, which because of its clarity would help name the world more precisely and thus organise it better for all. This is a very practical use of language that Pound picks up from Confucius.⁵²⁶ Language has to be clear of clutter, and precise enough to think of reality and organise society, for a clear understanding of the world. The need for the *mot juste* is not only aesthetic, but ethical. Concrete poetry did not set out to destroy sensitivity or intuition. Rather it is the combination of the most intellectual work with the clearest of intuitions. The annihilation of symbol and myth means only that the language used in the poems is that socio-historical language that Augusto de Campos mentions and that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Here stems the concrete poets' sense of revision—revision of old poetic forms, of history, of philosophy, but most of all a revision of language as the primary element of poetry. Not out of intellectual snobbism but out of a sense of responsibility towards language, poetry and the reader. And not only language (speech), but languages (images, sounds, etc.); from here comes the Noigandres poets' interest in semiotics.⁵²⁷ Language does not belong to idylls or fantasies but rather has to be practical, functional,

⁵²⁵ Apollinaire quoted in A. de Campos, 'Pontos-periferia-poesia concreta', *TPC*, pp. 17-25 (p. 21).

⁵²⁶ Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Peter Owen, 1938; repr. 1966), p. 16.

⁵²⁷ In particularity Décio Pignatari who constructed poems based on semiotic keys, *TPC*, pp. 163-164.

useful in the daily existence of modern man. The Noigandres project wanted to return poetry to the daily routine of people, that is one of the reasons they were interested in advertising, concrete poetry is the adequate language for the contemporary creative mind which permits communication in its fastest degree.⁵²⁸ The concrete poem becomes an object for mass consumption; or rather, was intended to be. At this stage of the manifestos and critical writing the group Noigandres is still writing with the possibility of a future, it is still looking for an integration between poetry and life. In this sense, concrete poetry carries forward the intentions of some movements of the historical avant-garde.⁵²⁹ Although a poem like 'GREVE' requires interpretation, the immediate sense that the reader faces is the transposition of the poem's structure to reality: there is something underneath. Underneath what we first see comes the pulse of what is necessary. This poem is divided into two sections each printed on different sheets of paper, one placed on top of the other. The top page is printed on opaque transparent paper (VV, p. 111). In this poem published in 1961 the combination of the pages suggests coexistence between the visual, acoustic and semantic levels of the poem. On the transparent paper are printed words that refer to the very act of writing and what this act encompasses for the liberation of the mind. On the bottom page there is a single word repeated forty-four times: 'greve'. The idea of two voices comes immediately to mind. The bottom page is repeating the word for social revolt and the top page is making reference to the creative capabilities of man. Without art man is a slave, without the liberation of the mind man is nothing but a drone, a cog in the industrial machine. There is no presentation or description in this poem. There are two situations combined, art and society. This poem cannot be accepted as such, and I do not think it asks to be, as Gonzalez and Treece expressed in their study. It requires first of all a

⁵²⁸ Haroldo de Campos, 'olho por olho a olho nu', in *Teoria da Poesia Concreta*, pp. 46-48 (p. 48).

⁵²⁹ Haroldo de Campos, 'Poesia e Modernidad: de Morte da Arte à Constelação. O poema pós-utópico', pp. 243-269.

performance/interpretation that is antithetical to that kind of fundamentalism which they imply. The reader must be engaged, without the reader's engagement the poem simply does not work. There is, indeed, a demand for an active engagement. The poem itself speaks of the creative mind and I think that reading should be as creative: 'poesia concreta: produto de uma evolução de formas. Implica uma dinâmica, não uma estática.'⁵³⁰

What also makes us think of concrete poems as objects is the presence of technique, of technical skill and knowledge. There is an almost scientific approximation to the creation of the poetical object and the problems this creation opens; for example, Haroldo de Campos speaks of the mathematics of composition:

Em vez do poema de tipo palavra-puxa-palavra, onde a estrutura resulta da interação das palavras ou fragmetos de palavras [...] uma estrutura matemática, planejada anteriormente à palavra.⁵³¹

The poem as a created object enters the world of other objects yet it is not the same as others, it has an overcharge of meaning which differentiates the poem from a television set. But up to a point they are in the world at a similar level, in a similar way. The difference is partly based on the reader's engagement. The need of the concrete poets to brake away from the figurative dimensions of language, with its correlatives of symbol, mystery and myth, forced them to ally themselves with a tradition of which they were also very critical, the enlightened mind as creator of means of production. The position of Noigandres is difficult. They wanted to create a poetry that would live in the contemporary, capitalist, growing modern Brazil, they wanted to create a useful and functional object; on the other hand, they wanted to create an

⁵³⁰ H. de Campos, 'Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição' *TPC*, pp. 93-95 (p. 93).

⁵³¹ H. de Campos, 'Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição' *TPC*, pp. 93-95 (p. 93).

object that, because of the overcharge of meaning, from the beginning would have the aura lost to the majority of objects made in these times.⁵³² Technique is essential, but technical knowledge had to be combined with intuition to create a poem.

For Octavio Paz the difference between technology and knowledge is essential.⁵³³ Technology is not a way in which to know reality, but a way in which to create a new reality which technology can know based on its own means and modes of production for appropriation and establishment of meaning.⁵³⁴ This new world (new world=industrialised world) is an alteration, an alienation from the reality of man and nature, and it sees these things, man and nature, as means to an end: more products. Objects for Paz, derivatives of the productions of technology, are not the same as things in the sense that they do not represent anything and as soon as they cease to function properly they are thrown away cluttering the world with unnecessary junk because their existence depends on the condition of their working order.⁵³⁵ Technology interposes itself between man and the world, and this is exactly what poetry, mythology, and religion, does for the Mexican poet, it brings them closer.⁵³⁶ Paz is not making a direct criticism of concrete poetry although he did not agree with their positions; he does add at the end of the section on technology in his essay that in the absence of meaning in the landscape of the modern industrial world what is found is a blank space where a poem can be formed. What he is criticising is that technology does not represent anything and does not intend to regard reality (man, nature) as figures but as materials for the different processes of production. Now, concrete poetry, although imbued in a technological (in terms of knowledge and understanding) relationship with the world, does have as a principal aim to give an image to the world, to 'presentify'

⁵³² Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', pp. 211-244.

⁵³³ Octavio Paz, 'Signos en rotación', in *El arco y la lira*, 3rd edn (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996; repr. 1998), pp. 253-284 (p. 261).

⁵³⁴ Paz, 'Signos en rotación', p. 262.

⁵³⁵ Paz, 'Signos en rotación', p. 263.

⁵³⁶ Paz, 'Signos en rotación', pp. 261-264.

reality in its modalities of nature, things, objects and man: 'relação entre poema-objecto concreto.'⁵³⁷ The world of the concrete poet is the conjunction of the different elements that form the modern world, not just the natural world blocked by technology which it is for Paz. For him, knowledge (i.e. before the industrial revolution) had the contemplation of reality as one of its ultimate goals, and it is exactly this passive contemplation to which the Noigandres poets objected. Chronological time, says Paz, gets ultimately cancelled by the time of technology which is forever increasing.⁵³⁸ A concrete poem's organisation as an ideogram is no longer chronological. Not only that, we can also see this in the concrete poem where language and time establish a different rapport; for example, in the various possibilities of reading. There is no longer the syllabic movement of linear verse poetry, nor the sequence of the metronome in the lines to guide the tempo of our reading. In the concrete poem we find syllables as elements in the pattern of sound in the poem, but without a chronological organisation. This does not mean that a concrete poem never presents the possibility of reading from left to right and from top to bottom, but it is just another possibility. If we think of poems like Augusto de Campos' 'Greve' where two different kinds of paper are used so we can see the words from the bottom and top sheets overlapping; or Haroldo de Campos' 'silencio' (XE, two), where the word silence cuts the poem diagonally, or his 'no â mago do ô mega' (XE, four) where the letter 'Z' can be combined with different suffixes: 'ero' and 'ênit' to form 'zero' and 'zênit', which in their turn form a kind of 'O'; we see the different possibilities of reading that render an immense (open) range of interpretations and meanings.

The collection of poems *O â mago do ô mega* were written between 1955-1956, are printed in white typography on black paper. Here it is clear that words and not lines of verse carry the movement of the poem.

⁵³⁷ H. de Campos 'Poesia concreta—linguagem—comunicação', *TPC*, pp. 70-85 (p. 73).

⁵³⁸ Paz, 'Signos en rotación', p. 264.

It is clear that words and not phrases, are the units of meaning; and, that words and not phrases form the images in the poems.

In these poems things are presented in their bare existence. That is words are presented as things. In 'No â mago do ô mega' we read: 'pecíolo: a coisa/ da coisa/ da coisa'. Haroldo avoids abstractions, he is talking of a very concrete existence, the petiole. The petiole is the last part of the stem that holds the leaf or flower to the branch or stem. If we follow the form of the 'O' of omega, it is interesting that the thing of the thing is something external to it. Yet the petiole shows, it holds the flower up for us to see. Here, then, the petiole is the word: the word that presets (or to use Haroldo's neologism, it presentifys) the thing, i.e. the flower: omega. The issue here is the action performed by language, the presentation of things made by language and the underlined difference between the two. Therefore there is an implicit approximation to things. See how the poet is not talking about industrial machinery but about flowers and bodies. The words in the poem should not need not be of new technologies, rather it is the poet's sensibility that registers the impact the new technologies that should be innovative as Cesar Vallejo said: 'los materiales artísticos que ofrece la vida moderna, han de ser asimilados por el espíritu y convertidos en sensibilidad'.⁵³⁹ There is a clear difference between what a thing and what an object is.⁵⁴⁰ For a poem to be an object it does not have to speak of objects, i.e. things made by man. In this poem Haroldo plays with the objectification of language and the poem by speaking of natural things, and of religion giving it a definitive and solid presence in nature.

There is a clear condensation of language, the 'piths and gists' which Pound spoke about.⁵⁴¹ Poetry: 'dichtung: condensare', reads Basil

⁵³⁹ Cesar Vallejo, 'Poesía nueva', in *Crónicas de poeta*, ed., intro. and notes by Manuel Ruano (Caracas: Ayacucho, 1996), pp. 44-45 (p. 44).

⁵⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, 'El origen de la obra de arte', in *Caminos de bosque* (Madrid: Alianza, 1995; repr. 1998), pp. 11-62.

⁵⁴¹ Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 203-214.

Bunting's formula.⁵⁴² There is an extreme condensation in the unit of the word: 'um duro/ tão oco/ um osso/ tão centro'. And this condensation serves a clear purpose, to present (presentify) the thing in the most clear and direct way. But unlike most concrete poems the semantic charge comes not by repetition. We must only think about the most famous ones, Gomringer's 'silencio'. 'O â mago do ô mega' does not construct meaning in that way, rather it isolates the word (feeling emphasised by the use of black paper). The word is presented in the space of the page, like the scattered stars of a constellation.

The clearness that concrete poetry looks for should not be confused with simplicity. The centre of omega is an image that refers to essence; for example, the 'centre of omega' is part of the Catholic liturgy. Yet his images of the centre move into a different plane, there are several references to eyes ('um olho'; 'parpadeando'; 'pálpebra'), then to flowers ('pétalo'; 'amêndoa'). There are also bodies or a body: ('cílios'; 'um osso'; 'um corpo/ a corpo'). And then the images of light ('nitescendo'), of nothingness ('ex nihilo'), of the void ('Zer'; 'vide de vacuo'). There is no correspondence between them. Haroldo is not saying that one thing is the other, rather he is following an ideogramic principle of composition, where the juxtaposition of different elements will create a another image or element not explicit in the composition. A connecting thread in the poem is the shape of the things named, oval or round: eyes, 'O', almond and the void, that which is at the centre of those things.

In this sense of the ideogramic principle of composition, if fragmentation of language occurs it should not be read as the fragmentation of the object, rather as the complication of the musical scheme of the poem, specifically in the case of pauses, stretches of silence and repetition. The poem as an object is not fragmented, it

⁵⁴² 'Basil Bunting, fumbling about with a German-Italian dictionary, found that this idea of poetry as concentration is as old almost as the German language. "Dichten" is the German verb corresponding to the noun "Dichtung" meaning poetry, and the lexicographer has rendered it by the Italian verb meaning "to condense". See Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 36.

depends or it responds to a different disposition of materials on the page. It responds, for example, in the case of the poem 'silencio', to certain compositional principles such as the isomorphism practiced by e e cummings in poems such as 'loneliness'. Taking this example of 'silencio', the word is fragmented diagonally from top left to bottom right crossing over the linguistic space of the poem. The word is fragmented in syllables: 'si/ (len)/ cio'. The central syllable is suspended in the middle of the poem (between a word and in parenthesis), interrupting the possibility a continuous reading. Haroldo does this also in 'No â mago do ô mega' where he fragments the word pensil thus: 'pe(vide de vacuo)nsil'. In terms of reading, there is total freedom to try different approaches to this composition. The juxtaposition of 'si (len) cio' across the poem forces us to enunciate each syllable; or we can just ignore it and then at the end of the reading go over 'si (len) cio' like putting a ribbon on top of a box. Or there is nothing stopping us from combining either readings or coming up with new ones. The performative aspect of concrete poetry is an essential quality to the 'virtual' or openness of the poems.

In 'no â mago do ô mega' the images are balanced between the erotic and the religious. 'Âmago' means core or heart, yet omega is round ('O'), thus in a first reading there is no centre of omega; its centre is a void. Nevertheless it has a centre, that void surrounded by the circular shape 'O'. With this dark centre and with the ideas of creation 'ex nihilo' one thinks of Courbet's *Origin of the World* (fig. 34), the dark centre between the woman's legs. In the poem we have a very erotic image: 'amêndoa do vazio' ('almond of void'). We read: 'amêndoa do vazio pecíolo: la cosa/ da coisa/ da coisa'. Is not difficult to see the playful analogy with the vagina and clitoris. Yet more important than these images is the organisation of language in order to produce meaning. If the 'pecíolo' is in fact the clitoris is not as important at the moment as the manner in which it is presented (presentified) in the poem. The

'pecíolo', a thing, a factual existence, there at the hands of the reader; a concrete reality, full of sound and meaning. In this poem, it is not only the condensation of the thing, but it is that condensation what makes the condensation possible. Is the word, 'pecíolo', which concretises existence in the solidity of the word. The thing of the thing, the thing's *thingness* would be the objectification (according to Pignatari) of the thing in the word: the word as the thing insofar as a designated object. This repetition does not become tautological because it is emphasising the objectivity of both, the word and the thing the word is designating. Repetition that brings to mind Gertrude Stein's 'a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose'.⁵⁴³ Here is the question of the approximation of man's mind or consciousness to reality. An objective poetic language belongs to the world, and not to the conceptual sphere. Words in poetry should correspond to real things.

This presentation of the poetic object is backed up by the 'annihilation' of the subject who speaks, what can be named the poetical I. There is no introspection in these poems. It is no longer the experience of a soul that sets its experiences on paper. It is language that speaks, it is language extended on the page in the series of semantic and poetical relationships who speaks. Language presented in space: white letters on black paper. This is exactly what Barthes means by the 'death of the author'. The Author is no longer the origin of his texts, but a faceless writer that steps behind the curtain of speech. It is language who performs the texts, and the Author as its alpha and omega is no more.⁵⁴⁴ Thus the text is displayed as an exteriority; this exteriority functions in direct negation of the interiority of the Author. For Barthes the Author is the creation of the Enlightenment, who granted maximum importance to the individual person.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³ Gertrude Stein, 'Sacred Emily', in *Geography and Plays*, foreword by Sherwood Anderson (New York: Something Else Press, 1968), pp. 178-188 (p. 187).

⁵⁴⁴ Although by the 1960s Haroldo de Campos had begun his long poem *Galaxias* which again presents the first person as the main agent of writing, *Galáxias*, 2nd edn (Sao Paulo: 34, 2004).

⁵⁴⁵ Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Œuvres complètes*, III, pp. 40-45 (p. 40).

And it is Mallarmé, a seminal character here for Barthes, and for Haroldo and the rest of Noigandres throughout their production, who searched for and found a writing (*écriture*) that suspends the personal language opening the space for language itself to act.⁵⁴⁶ The writer manipulates language, he works with it but no longer to speak about himself, rather there is a search for clarity, the clarity of form: 'sa main, détachée de toute voix, portée par un pur geste d'inscription (et non d'expression), trace un champ sans origine —ou qui, du moins, n'a autre origine que la langue lui-même, c'est-à-dire cela même que sans lesse remet en cause toute origine.'⁵⁴⁷ This is why the issue of language as an object can be approached or should be approached as a problem of exteriority. With the withdrawal of the Author, as well the assigning agent of meaning, the Origin of the text in the Author himself evaporates. Thus the text, now without an ultimate meaning will remain open. Poems like 'silencio' and 'no â mago do ô mega' cannot be deciphered. They communicate their structures, their structural relations which the reader can follow forming patterns of meaning, yet never to form 'the' meaning. There is no ultimate meaning because here lies one of the most crucial criticisms of western thought, the dismemberment of the Idea, the ruling metaphysical-theological concept which would render truth and meaning to all. The exteriority of language questions the basis of language, and language, as Barthes says, questions all origins; language being exterior is not able to go in a vertical direction and it can only move to the sides. The poem becomes then a field to explore by the poet and the reader, a field that gestures to man's position in the world. And it is up to the reader to fulfil this in an informed and active (performative) reading of these poems. The concrete poem is communication; potential communication that as an open sign waits to be interpreted by the reader. This interpretation is not only intellectual but also physical, as Pierre Garnier writes:

⁵⁴⁶ Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Œuvres complètes*, III, pp. 40-45 (p. 41).

⁵⁴⁷ Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Œuvres complètes*, III, pp. 40-45 (p. 43).

Le Spatialisme, au contraire, réintroduit le corps dans la conception même du poème: la poésie phonétique naît directement des soufflés et des articulation, la poésie phonique naît de la bouche, la poésie visuelle était créé sous le contrôle des yeux, la poésie mécanique est un art des main et des doigts, etc. Le corps qui était jusqu'alors indifférent et placide connaît dans le Spatialisme l'activité d'une ruch: les mains, les bras travaillent comme pattes d'insects, les yeux s'activent, disposent, mesurent, vérifient, ne lâchent pas la moindre particule qu'elle ne soit en place; le corps vit en poésie.⁵⁴⁸

The body of the reader and the poet are active in their engagement of concrete poetry. The actualization of the concrete poem happens more than with regular poems *in* the world because the concrete poem is to start with an object in it.

I opened this chapter with Sarduy's ideas about concrete poetry, and it is with another opinion of his that I will close it. The concrete poetry movement is 'una manera, a decir verdad, muy sudamericana de percibir y pensar de un golpe lo real.'⁵⁴⁹ I think that this encompasses the reality into which the concrete poem is inserted, and into which it adds a certain idea of order, but also the fact that it is open, facing the reader. The internal time of the reader and the external existence of the poem combine in a mutual identification of existences, which require in its turn an identification of the reader and the world. This identification, this way of thinking the world are combined in the concrete poem as if this were a platform of recognition where both poetry and man can communicate freely.

⁵⁴⁸ Pierre Garnier, *Spatialism et poésie concrète* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 22.

⁵⁴⁹ Sarduy, '¿Sabe usted lo que es "concretud"?', p. 240.

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have analysed the work of Oliverio Girondo, Jorge Eduardo Eielson, and the Noigandres group of concrete poetry from the basic premise that their poetics are shaped to an important degree by preoccupations about presence. Each poet did this in their own particular way. Girondo's basis is sound, and from there he creates a rhizome that extends to the different levels of the text. Jorge Eduardo Eielson based his artistic explorations on the idea of material presence through different media. His poems, plays, visual work and performances, each with their own particularities, underline the theme of presence. Limits and transgressing those limits are constant themes in his work. Girondo and Eielson share a necessity to cross over, to establish a presence that is not set and complete but rather that is forever taking shape, forever becoming. That is why, it seems to me, Eielson moves so easily through all the different media he works with, and that is also why Girondo moves between the ecstatic feelings about the objective reality of the world and the desperate and desolate intuition that there is nothing else. Girondo struggles between the ego's affirmation and a socially and culturally constructed ego. There is no one answer, thus Girondo must continue moving, unable to stop. Eielson discovered that the limits between genres were artificial to his own artistic search and therefore for him there was no conflict in moving from one medium to another. His search continued through all of the media that he used and that is why I think that the very notions of limits became a main concern for him; the limits

between one person and the next, between lover and beloved, between objects and subjects. That is why the knot is the perfect metaphor for this idea, and at the same time the perfect material realization. This knot is also a viable metaphor for the complex universe of *En la masmédula*. The creation of a spatial form indicates that the book was intended to stretch beyond the regular time structure of conventional poetry. Gironde suggested this spatial form weaving the different levels of the book and creating an interrelationship among them that would suggest precisely a knot-form. The lovers are in Gironde an image of interconnection that presents this conception of the book's space and what lies outside. It is obvious that in Gironde's case there is no 'real' presence of the book in the world. Gironde appeals to the reader's imagination. That is where the poem is truly created, but just as in Eielson, the effect of the book is one of questions about our notions of reality, and the limitations between objects and subjects, and of subjects within themselves. Although some of their poems speak of personal issues, the concrete poets mostly followed the premise that it was the turn of language to speak in the poem and that the author should step behind it. It was the concrete poets who managed to integrate time and space in poetry. This is far from being unproblematic. However, their criticism and theoretical writing kept them away from banality. Their poems are a limit in themselves, a façade that marked an epoch. This façade is what we encounter as readers and it demands to be critically read. I believe that this is the ethical demand of this poetry. It has to be deciphered, engaged with in order to be fulfilled. Their work displays that the poem is something that belongs to the order of objects in this world. The idea of presence in the poetics of the concrete poet is practically undeniable. I think that the poetics of Gironde, Eielson, and the Noigandres group were shaped by this idea. It is precisely the concrete poetry project that could truly present an object in the world. The concrete poem is not a text and it is not a design. It is a complex object that exists at different levels. Most

concrete poems exist between the pages of a book, however in them all there is the potential to become three dimensional or independent from our habitual reading habits. The concrete poem considered as an object opens the possibilities to a different relationship with language and the printed word. This is now changing with electronic poetry, a subject beyond the present work. Indeed, with electronic poetry the whole notion of 'reality' is questioned once again from a completely different angle.

But it is not only the concept of reality which is put under question by these poets. Also the questions point towards our notions of subjectivity, and of humanity. The poem as object or considered as object becomes external to the subject; a subjectivity which has been questioned by the poetic reasoning of Modernity and the avant-gardes. In these writers there is a desire to move beyond humanity towards a post-historical world. This is the return to the animal side of man in Gironde and Eielson, and the abandonment of subjectivity in concrete poetry. This intention points towards a complex relationship with history and modernity. The complexity lies in the disappearance of the division between the subject and the object. That is why the poem and language, as an essential characteristic of humanity, leaves humanity as it goes on to become an object among objects. The need for the presence of the poem seeks an ideal relationship where there is no longer a need between subjects and objects in a world where art forms part of everyday reality. Humanity here does not mean the end of man but the end of an understanding of man as the centre of the cosmos. That is, to go beyond the historical and social identity towards *that* which makes man exist in the world:

En nuestra cultura, el hombre—lo hemos visto—ha sido siempre el resultado de una división, y, a la vez, de una articulación de lo animal y lo humano, en la cual uno de los dos términos de la operación era también lo que estaba en juego. Volver inoperante la

máquina que gobierna nuestra concepción del hombre significará, por lo tanto, ya no buscar nuevas articulaciones—más eficaces o más auténticas—, sino exhibir el vacío central, el hiato que separa—en el hombre—el hombre y el animal, arriesgarse en ese vacío.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁵⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Lo abierto: el hombre y el animal*, trans. by Flavia Costa y Edgardo Castro (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2006), p. 167.

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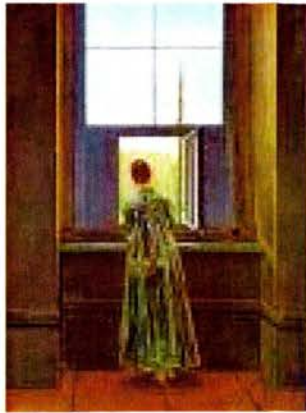
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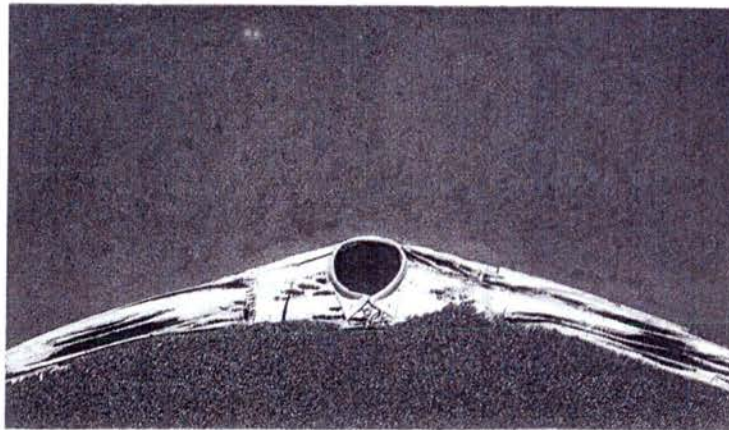
IMAGES

Fig. 1



Caspar David Friedrich, *Frau am Fenster* (1822)

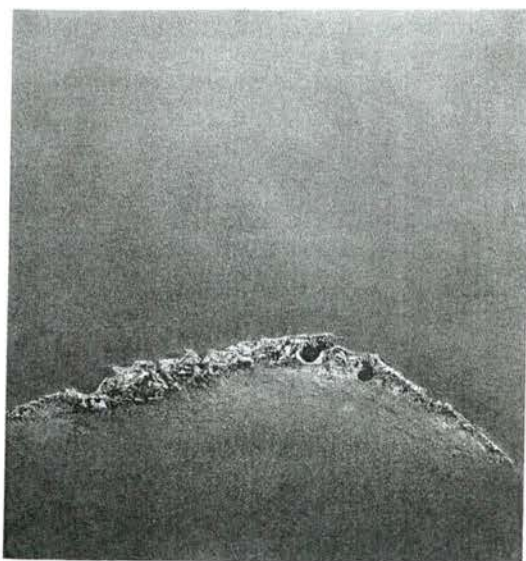
Fig. 2



Camisa quemada (1962).

Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Camisa quemada* (1962)

Fig. 3



Paisaje infinito de la costa del Perú. Serie IV-10 (1961).

Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Paisaje infinito de la cosa del Perú. Serie IV-10 (1961)*

Fig. 4



Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Paisaje infinito de la cosa del Perú. Serie I-5 (1959)*

Fig. 5

beba coca cola
babe cola
beba coca
babe cola caco
caco
cola
cloaca

Fig. 6



Dormir es una obra maestra (Lima, 1978).

Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Dormir es una obra maestra* (1978)

Fig. 7



Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Requiem por Marilyn Monroe* (1962)

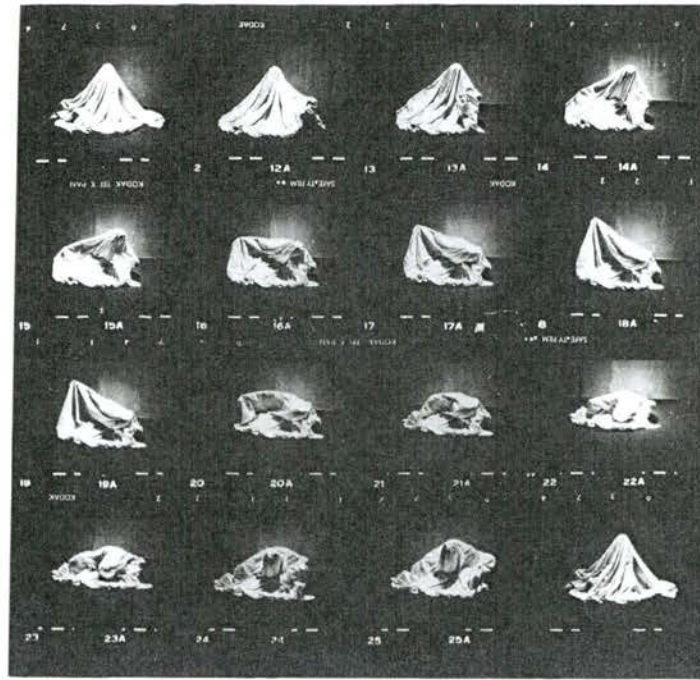
Fig. 8



La escalera infinita.

Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *La escalera infinita* (1998)

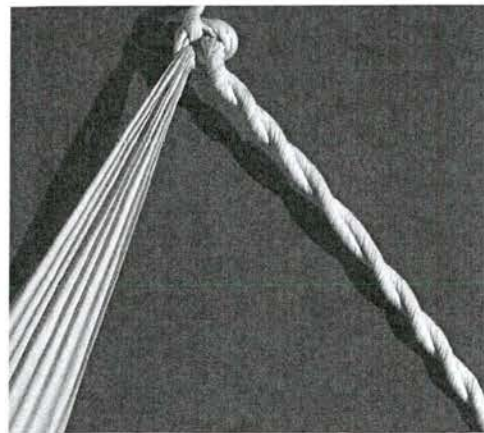
Fig. 9



Paracas/Pyramid, performance, Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf 1974.

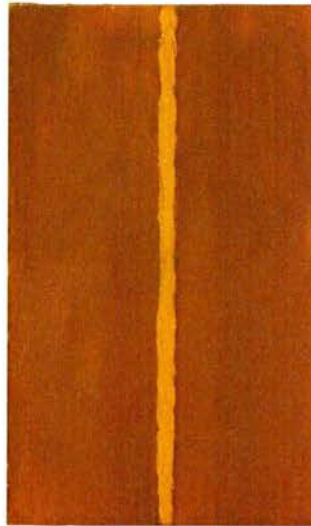
Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Paracas/Pyramid* (1974)

Fig. 10



Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Quipus 15 AZ-1* (1965)

Fig. 11



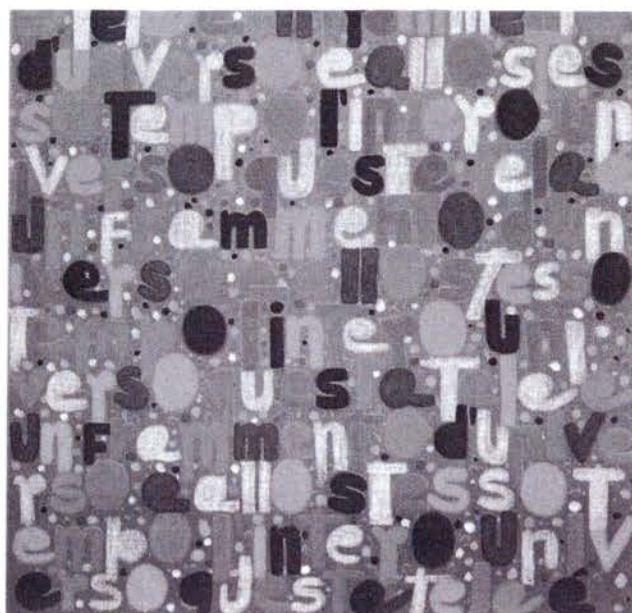
Barnet Newman, *Onement I* (1948)

Fig. 12



Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Esta silla de madera es de papel*

Fig. 13



14. Questa tela è un frammento dell'universo, 1988.

Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Esta tela es un fragemento del universo* (1988)

Fig. 14



René Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1928-1929)

Fig. 15



Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Codice sul volo degli uccelli y sugli annodamenti* (1993)

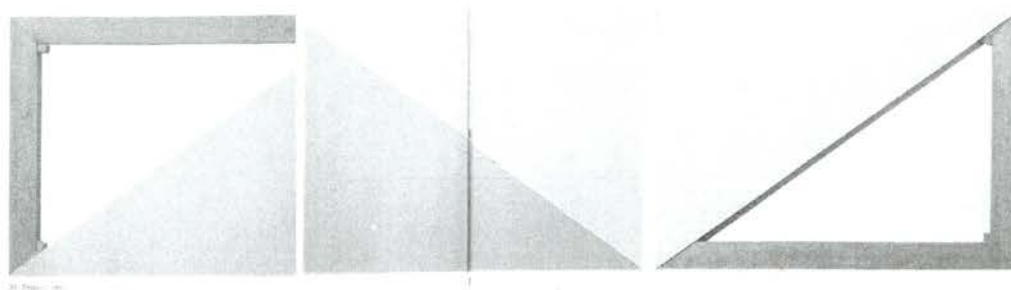
Fig.16



Proliferación (1993).

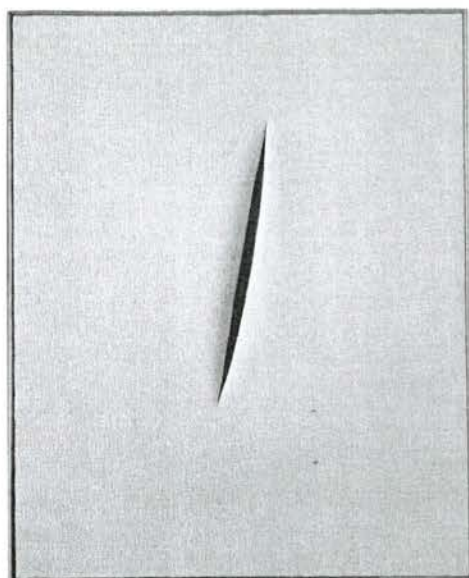
Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Proliferación* (1993)

Fig. 17



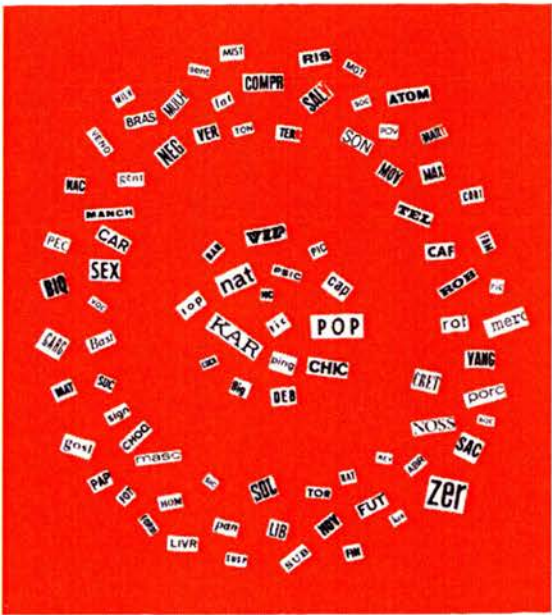
Jorge Eduardo Eielson, *Triptico* (1993)

Fig. 18



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale* (circa 1960)

Fig. 19



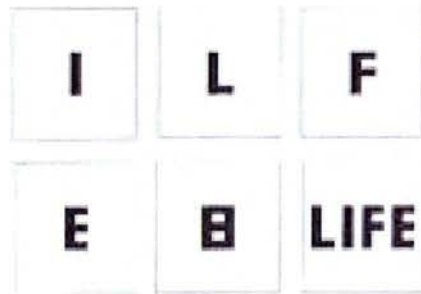
Augusto de Campos, 'O anti-ruído' (1964) (VV, 129)

Fig. 20



Augusto de Campos, 'Luxo' (1965)

Fig. 21



Décio Pignatari, 'LIFE' (circa 1957)

Fig. 22



Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'order' at Little Sparta, Scotland.

Fig. 23



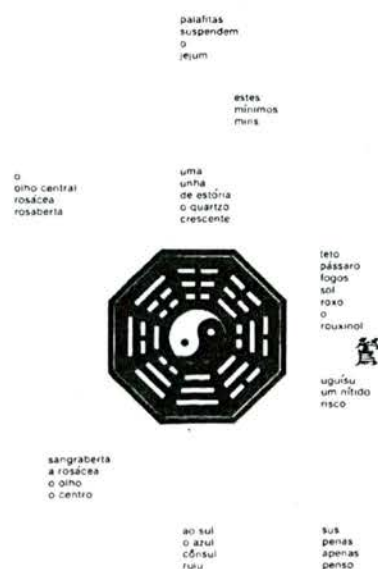
Augusto de Campos, *Poemobiles* (circa 1968)

Fig. 24



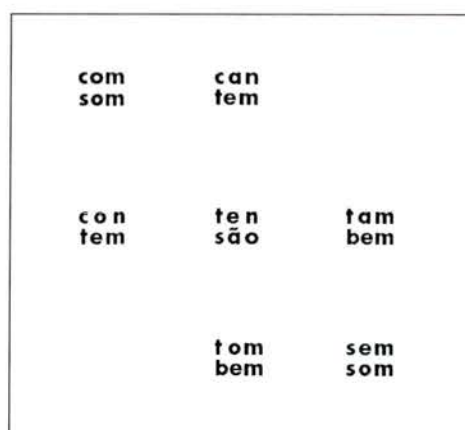
Augusto de Campos, '*cidadecitycité*' (1987)

Fig. 25



Haroldo de Campos, 'Poemandala' (1971)

Fig. 26



Augusto de Campos, 'tensão' (1956)

Fig. 27

lygia finge
 rs ser
 digital
 dedat illa(grypho)
 lynx lynx assim
 felyna ly
 figlia felix na nx
 seja: quando so lango so
 ly
 gia la sera sorella
 so only lonely it-
 i

Augusto de Campos, 'lygia fingers', *poetamenos* (1953)

Fig. 28

 eis
 os
 amantes sem parentes
 senão
 os corpos
 irmãum gemeoutrem
 cima eu baixela
 ecoraçambos
 d u p l a m p l i n f a n t u n o (s) e m p r e
 semen(r)emventre
 estesse aquelele
 inhumanoutro

Augusto de Campos, 'eis os amantes', *poetamenos* (1953)

Fig. 29



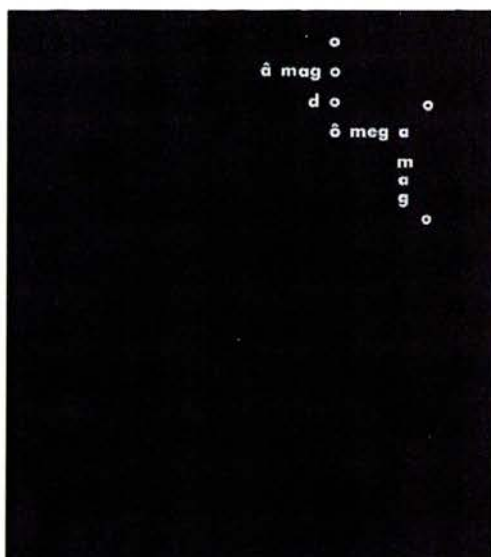
Augusto de Campos, 'psiu!', *Popcretos* (1966)

Fig. 30



Augusto de Campos, 'olho por olho', *Popcretos* (1964)

Fig. 31



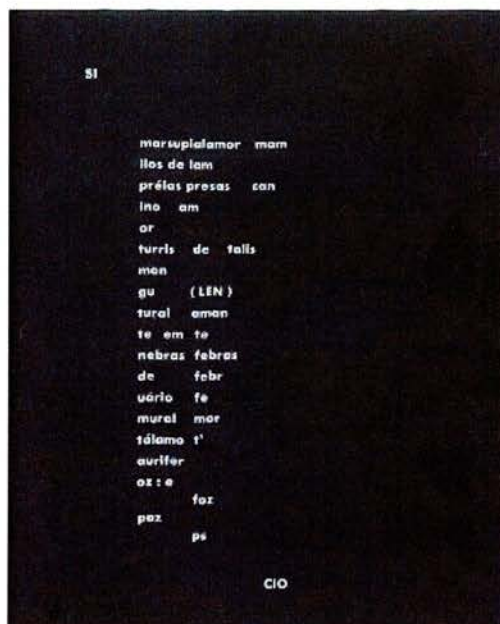
Haroldo de Campos, 'amago do ômega' (1955-56)

Fig. 32



Haroldo de Campos, 'No amago do Ômega', (1955-56)

Fig. 33



Haroldo de Campos, 'Sielncio', (1955-56)

Fig. 34



Gustave Courbet, 'L'Origine du monde' (1866)